

MISS BRACEGIRDLE  
AND OTHERS

STACY AUMONIER



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MISS BRACEGIRDLE  
AND OTHERS

*Books by Stacy Aumonier*

FRIENDS AND OTHER STORIES

HEARTBEAT

JUST OUTSIDE

MISS BRACEGIRDLE AND OTHERS

OLGA BARDEL

ONE AFTER ANOTHER

QUERRILS

THE GOLDEN WINDMILL AND  
OTHER STORIES



MISS BRACEGIRDLE  
AND OTHERS

BY  
STACY AUMONIER



GARDEN CITY                      NEW YORK  
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY  
1923

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MISS BRACEGIRDLE  
AND OTHERS





# Miss Bracegirdle and Others

## MISS BRACEGIRDLE DOES HER DUTY

**T**HIS is the room, madame."

"Ah, thank you . . . thank you."

"Does it appear satisfactory to madame?"

"Oh, yes, thank you . . . quite."

"Does madame require anything further?"

"Er—if not too late, may I have a hot bath?"

"*Parfaitement*, madame. The bathroom is at the end of the passage on the left. I will go and prepare it for madame."

"There is one thing more. . . . I have had a very long journey. I am very tired. Will you please see that I am not disturbed in the morning until I ring."

"Certainly, madame."

Millicent Bracegirdle was speaking the truth—she *was* tired. In the sleepy cathedral town of Easingstoke, from which she came, it was customary for everyone to speak the truth. It was customary, moreover, for everyone to lead simple, self-denying lives—to give up their time to good works and elevating thoughts. One had only to glance at little Miss Bracegirdle to see that in her was epitomized

all the virtues and ideals of Easingstoke. Indeed, it was the pursuit of duty which had brought her to the Hotel de l'Oest at Bordeaux on this summer's night. She had travelled from Easingstoke to London, then without a break to Dover, crossed that horrid stretch of sea to Calais, entrained for Paris, where she of necessity had to spend four hours—a terrifying experience—and then had come on to Bordeaux, arriving at midnight. The reason of this journey being that some one had to come to Bordeaux to meet her young sister-in-law, who was arriving the next day from South America. The sister-in-law was married to a missionary in Paraguay, but the climate not agreeing with her, she was returning to England. Her dear brother, the dean, would have come himself, but the claims on his time were so extensive, the parishioners would miss him so . . . it was clearly Millicent's duty to go.

She had never been out of England before, and she had a horror of travel, and an ingrained distrust of foreigners. She spoke a little French—sufficient for the purposes of travel and for obtaining any modest necessities, but not sufficient for carrying on any kind of conversation. She did not deplore this latter fact, for she was of opinion that French people were not the kind of people that one would naturally want to have conversation with; broadly speaking, they were not quite “nice,” in spite of their ingratiating manners.

The dear dean had given her endless advice, warning her earnestly not to enter into conversation with

strangers, to obtain all information from the police, railway officials—in fact, any one in an official uniform. He deeply regretted to say that he was afraid that France was not a country for a woman to travel about in *alone*. There were loose, bad people about, always on the lookout. . . . He really thought perhaps he ought not to let her go. It was only by the utmost persuasion, in which she rather exaggerated her knowledge of the French language and character, her courage, and indifference to discomfort, that she managed to carry the day.

She unpacked her valise, placed her things about the room, tried to thrust back the little stabs of homesickness as she visualized her darling room at the deanery. How strange and hard and unfriendly seemed these foreign hotel bedrooms—heavy and depressing, no chintz and lavender and photographs of . . . all the dear family, the dean, the nephews and nieces, the interior of the cathedral during harvest festival, no samplers and needlework or coloured reproductions of the paintings by Marcus Stone. Oh dear, how foolish she was! What did she expect?

She disrobed and donned a dressing-gown; then, armed with a sponge-bag and towel, she crept timidly down the passage to the bathroom, after closing her bedroom door and turning out the light. The gay bathroom cheered her. She wallowed luxuriously in the hot water, regarding her slim legs with quiet satisfaction. And for the first time since leaving

home there came to her a pleasant moment—a sense of enjoyment in her adventure. After all, it *was* rather an adventure, and her life had been peculiarly devoid of it. What queer lives some people must live, travelling about, having experiences! How old was she? Not really old—not by any means. Forty-two? Forty-three? She had shut herself up so. She hardly ever regarded the potentialities of age. As the world went, she was a well-preserved woman for her age. A life of self-abnegation, simple living, healthy walking and fresh air, had kept her younger than these hurrying, pampered city people.

Love? yes, once when she was a young girl . . . he was a schoolmaster, a most estimable kind gentleman. They were never engaged—not actually, but it was a kind of understood thing. For three years it went on, this pleasant understanding and friendship. He was so gentle, so distinguished and considerate. She would have been happy to have continued in this strain for ever. But there was something lacking. Stephen had curious restless lapses. From the physical aspect of marriage she shrunk—yea, even with Stephen, who was gentleness and kindness itself. And then one day . . . one day he went away—vanished, and never returned. They told her he had married one of the country girls—a girl who used to work in Mrs. Forbes's dairy—not a very nice girl, she feared, one of these fast, pretty, foolish women. Heigho! well, she had lived that down, destructive as the blow

appeared at the time. One lives everything down in time. There is always work, living for others, faith, duty. . . . At the same time she could sympathize with people who found satisfaction in unusual experiences.

There would be lots to tell the dear dean when she wrote to him on the morrow—nearly losing her spectacles on the restaurant car; the amusing remarks of an American child on the train to Paris; the curious food everywhere, nothing simple and plain; the two English ladies at the hotel in Paris who told her about the death of their uncle—the poor man being taken ill on Friday and dying on Sunday afternoon, just before tea-time; the kindness of the hotel proprietor who had sat up for her; the prettiness of the chambermaid. Oh, yes, everyone was really very kind. The French people, after all, were very nice. She had seen nothing—nothing but was quite nice and decorous. There would be lots to tell the dean to-morrow.

Her body glowed with the friction of the towel. She again donned her night attire and her thick, woollen dressing-gown. She tidied up the bathroom carefully in exactly the same way she was accustomed to do at home, then once more gripping her sponge-bag and towel, and turning out the light, she crept down the passage to her room. Entering the room she switched on the light and shut the door quickly. Then one of those ridiculous things happened—just the kind of thing you would expect to happen in a

foreign hotel. The handle of the door came off in her hand.

She ejaculated a quiet "Bother!" and sought to replace it with one hand, the other being occupied with the towel and sponge-bag. In doing this she behaved foolishly, for thrusting the knob carelessly against the steel pin—without properly securing it—she only succeeded in pushing the pin farther into the door and the knob was not adjusted. She uttered another little "Bother" and put her sponge-bag and towel down on the floor. She then tried to recover the pin with her left hand but it had gone in too far.

"How very foolish!" she thought, "I shall have to ring for the chambermaid—and perhaps the poor girl has gone to bed."

She turned and faced the room, and suddenly the awful horror was upon her. *There was a man asleep in her bed!*

The sight of that swarthy face on the pillow, with its black tousled hair and heavy moustache, produced in her the most terrible moment of her life. Her heart nearly stopped. For some seconds she could neither think nor scream, and her first thought was: "I mustn't scream!"

She stood there like one paralyzed, staring at the man's head and the great curved hunch of his body under the clothes. When she began to think she thought very quickly, and all her thoughts worked together. The first vivid realization was that it

wasn't the man's fault; it was *her* fault. *She was in the wrong room.* It was the Man's room. The rooms were identical, but there were all his things about, his clothes thrown carelessly over chairs, his collar and tie on the wardrobe, his great heavy boots and the strange yellow trunk. She must get out somehow, anyhow.

She clutched once more at the door, feverishly driving her finger-nails into the hole where the elusive pin had vanished. She tried to force her fingers in the crack and open the door that way, but it was of no avail. She was to all intents and purposes locked in—locked in a bedroom in a strange hotel alone with a man . . . a foreigner . . . *a Frenchman!* She must think. She must think. . . . She switched off the light. If the light was off he might not wake up. It might give her time to think how to act. It was surprising that he had not awakened. If he *did* wake up what would he do? How could she explain herself? He wouldn't believe her. No one would believe her. In an English hotel it would be difficult enough, but here where she wasn't known, where they were all foreigners and consequently antagonistic . . . merciful heavens!

She *must* get out. Should she wake the man? No, she couldn't do that. He might murder her. He might. . . . Oh, it was too awful to contemplate! Should she scream? ring for the chambermaid? But no, it would be the same thing. People

would come rushing. They would find her there in the strange man's bedroom after midnight—she, Millicent Bracegirdle, sister of the Dean of Easingstoke! Easingstoke!

Visions of Easingstoke flashed through her alarmed mind. Visions of the news arriving, women whispering around tea-tables: "Have you heard, my dear? . . . Really no one would have imagined! Her poor brother! He will of course have to resign, you know, my dear. Have a little more cream, my love."

Would they put her in prison? She might be in the room for the purpose of stealing or . . . She might be in the room for the purpose of breaking every one of the ten commandments. There was no explaining it away. She was a ruined woman, suddenly and irretrievably, unless she could open the door. The chimney? Should she climb up the chimney? But where would that lead to? And then she visualized the man pulling her down by her legs when she was already smothered in soot. Any moment he might wake up. . . .

She thought she heard the chambermaid going along the passage. If she had wanted to scream, she ought to have screamed before. The maid would know she had left the bathroom some minutes ago. Was she going to her room? Suddenly she remembered that she had told the chambermaid that she was not to be disturbed until she rang the next morning. That was something. Nobody would be going to her room to find out that she was not there.



An abrupt and desperate plan formed in her mind. It was already getting on for one o'clock. The man was probably a quite harmless commercial traveller or business man. He would probably get up about seven or eight o'clock, dress quickly and go out. She would hide under his bed until he went. Only a matter of a few hours. Men don't look under their beds, although she made a religious practice of doing so herself. When he went he would be sure to open the door all right. The handle would be lying on the floor as though it had dropped off in the night. He would probably ring for the chambermaid or open it with a penknife. Men were so clever at those things. When he had gone she would creep out and steal back to her room, and then there would be no necessity to give any explanation to any one. But heavens! What an experience! Once under the white frill of that bed she would be safe till the morning. In daylight nothing seemed so terrifying.

With feline precaution she went down on her hands and knees and crept toward the bed. What a lucky thing there was that broad white frill! She lifted it at the foot of the bed and crept under. There was just sufficient depth to take her slim body. The floor was fortunately carpeted all over, but it seemed very close and dusty. Suppose she coughed or sneezed! Anything might happen. Of course. . . it would be much more difficult to explain her presence under the bed than to explain her presence just inside the door. She held her breath in

suspense. No sound came from above, but under this frill it was difficult to hear anything. It was almost more nerve-racking than hearing everything . . . listening for signs and portents. This temporary escape in any case would give her time to regard the predicament detachedly. Up to the present she had not been able to visualize the full significance of her action. She had in truth lost her head. She had been like a wild animal, consumed with the sole idea of escape . . . a mouse or a cat would do this kind of thing—take cover and lie low. If only it hadn't all happened *abroad!* She tried to frame sentences of explanation in French, but French escaped her. And then—they talked so rapidly, these people. They didn't listen. The situation was intolerable. Would she be able to endure a night of it?

At present she was not altogether uncomfortable, only stuffy and . . . very, very frightened. But she had to face six or seven or eight hours of it—perhaps even then discovery in the end! The minutes flashed by as she turned the matter over and over in her head. There was no solution. She began to wish she had screamed or awakened the man. She saw now that that would have been the wisest and most politic thing to do; but she had allowed ten minutes or a quarter of an hour to elapse from the moment when the chambermaid would know that she had left the bathroom. They would want an explanation of what she had been doing in

the man's bedroom all that time. Why hadn't she screamed before?

She lifted the frill an inch or two and listened. She thought she heard the man breathing but she couldn't be sure. In any case it gave her more air. She became a little bolder, and thrust her face partly through the frill so that she could breathe freely. She tried to steady her nerves by concentrating on the fact that—well, there it was. She had done it. She must make the best of it. Perhaps it would be all right after all.

“Of course I shan't sleep,” she kept on thinking, “I shan't be able to. In any case it will be safer not to sleep. I must be on the watch.”

She set her teeth and waited grimly. Now that she had made up her mind to see the thing through in this manner she felt a little calmer. She almost smiled as she reflected that there would certainly be something to tell the dear Dean when she wrote to him to-morrow. How would he take it? Of course he would believe it—he had never doubted a single word that she had uttered in her life, but the story would sound so . . . preposterous. In Easingstoke it would be almost impossible to envisage such an experience. She, Millicent Bracegirdle, spending a night under a strange man's bed in a foreign hotel! What would those women think? Fanny Shields and that garrulous old Mrs. Rusbridger? Perhaps . . . yes, perhaps it would be advisable to tell the dear Dean to let the story go

no further. One could hardly expect Mrs. Rushbridger to . . . not make implications . . . exaggerate.

Oh dear! What were they all doing now? They would all be asleep, everyone in Easingstoke. Her dear brother always retired at ten-fifteen. He would be sleeping calmly and placidly, the sleep of the just . . . breathing the clear sweet air of Sussex, not this—Oh, it *was* stuffy! She felt a great desire to cough. She mustn't do that. Yes, at nine-thirty all the servants summoned to the library—a short service—never more than fifteen minutes, her brother didn't believe in a great deal of ritual—then at ten o'clock cocoa for everyone. At ten-fifteen bed for everyone. The dear sweet bedroom with the narrow white bed, by the side of which she had knelt every night as long as she could remember—even in her dear mother's day—and said her prayers.

Prayers! Yes, that was a curious thing. This was the first night in her life's experience that she had not said her prayers on retiring. The situation was certainly very peculiar . . . exceptional, one might call it. God would understand and forgive such a lapse. And yet after all, why . . . what was to prevent her saying her prayers? Of course she couldn't kneel in the proper devotional attitude, that would be a physical impossibility, nevertheless, perhaps her prayers might be just as efficacious . . . if they came from the heart. So little Miss Brace-

girdle curved her body and placed her hands in a devout attitude in front of her face and quite inaudibly murmured her prayers under the strange man's bed.

"Our Father which art in heaven; hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven; Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses. . . ."

Trespasses! Yes, surely she was trespassing on this occasion, but God would understand. She had not wanted to trespass. She was an unwitting sinner. Without uttering a sound she went through her usual prayers in her heart. At the end she added fervently:

"Please God protect me from the dangers and perils of this night."

Then she lay silent and inert, strangely soothed by the effort of praying. "After all," she thought, "it isn't the attitude which matters—it is that which occurs deep down in us."

For the first time she began to meditate—almost to question—church forms and dogma. If an attitude was not indispensable why—a building, a ritual, a church at all? Of course her dear brother couldn't be wrong, the church was so old, so very old, its root deep buried in the story of human life, it was only that . . . well, outward forms *could* be misleading. Her own present position for instance. In the eyes of the world she had, by one silly careless little action, convicted herself of being the breaker

of every single one of the ten commandments.

She tried to think of one of which she could not be accused. But no—even to dishonouring her father and mother, bearing false witness, stealing, coveting her neighbour's . . . husband! That was the worst thing of all. Poor man! He might be a very pleasant honourable married gentleman with children and she—she was in a position to compromise him! Why hadn't she screamed! Too late! Too late!

It began to get very uncomfortable, stuffy, but at the same time draughty, and the floor was getting harder every minute. She changed her position stealthily and controlled her desire to cough. Her heart was beating rapidly. Over and over again recurred the vivid impression of every little incident and argument that had occurred to her from the moment she left the bathroom. This must, of course, be the room next to her own. So confusing with perhaps twenty bedrooms all exactly alike on one side of a passage—how was one to remember whether one's number was 115 or 116?

Her mind began to wander idly off into her school-days. She was always very bad at figures. She disliked Euclid and all those subjects about angles and equations—so unimportant, not leading anywhere. History she liked, and botany, and reading about strange foreign lands, although she had always been too timid to visit them. And the lives of great people, *most* fascinating—Oliver Cromwell, Lord Beaconsfield, Lincoln, Grace Darling—*there* was a

heroine for you—General Booth, a great good man, even if a little vulgar. She remembered dear old Miss Trimming talking about him one afternoon at the vicar of St. Bride's garden party. She was so amusing. She. . . . *Good heavens!*

*Almost unwittingly, Millicent Bracegirdle had emitted a violent sneeze!*

It was finished! For the second time that night she was conscious of her heart nearly stopping. For the second time that night she was so paralyzed with fear that her mentality went to pieces. Now she would hear the man get out of bed. He would walk across to the door, switch on the light, and then lift up the frill. She could almost see that fierce moustached face glaring at her and growling something in French. Then he would thrust out an arm and drag her out. And then? O God in heaven! What then? . . .

“I shall scream before he does it. Perhaps I had better scream now. If he drags me out he will clap his hand over my mouth. Perhaps chloroform. . . .”

But somehow she could not scream. She was too frightened even for that. She lifted the frill and listened. Was he moving stealthily across the carpet? She thought—no, she couldn't be sure. Anything might be happening. He might strike her from above—with one of those heavy boots perhaps. Nothing seemed to be happening, but the suspense was intolerable. She realized now that

she hadn't the power to endure a night of it. Anything would be better than this—disgrace, imprisonment, even death. She would crawl out, wake the man, and try and explain as best she could.

She would switch on the light, cough, and say: "*Monsieur!*"

Then he would start up and stare at her.

Then she would say—what should she say?

"*Pardon, monsieur, mais je—*" What on earth was the French for "I have made a mistake"?

"*J'ai tort. C'est la chambre—er—incorrect. Voulezvous—er—*"

What was the French for "door-knob," "let me go"?

It didn't matter. She would turn on the light, cough and trust to luck. If he got out of bed, and came toward her, she would scream the hotel down. . . .

The resolution formed, she crawled deliberately out at the foot of the bed. She scrambled hastily toward the door—a perilous journey. In a few seconds the room was flooded with light. She turned toward the bed, coughed, and cried out boldly:

"*Monsieur!*"

Then, for the third time that night, little Miss Bracegirdle's heart all but stopped. In this case the climax of the horror took longer to develop, but when it was reached, it clouded the other two experiences into insignificance.

*The man on the bed was dead!*



She had never beheld death before, but one does not mistake death.

She stared at him bewildered, and repeated almost in a whisper:

“*Monsieur! . . . Monsieur!*”

Then she tip-toed toward the bed. The hair and moustache looked extraordinarily black in that gray wax-like setting. The mouth was slightly open, and the face, which in life might have been vicious and sensual, looked incredibly peaceful and far away.

It was as though she were regarding the features of a man across some vast passage of time, a being who had always been completely remote from mundane preoccupations.

When the full truth came home to her, little Miss Bracegirdle buried her face in her hands and murmured:

“Poor fellow . . . poor fellow!”

For the moment her own position seemed an affair of small consequence. She was in the presence of something greater and more all-pervading. Almost instinctively she knelt by the bed and prayed.

For a few moments she seemed to be possessed by an extraordinary calmness and detachment. The burden of her hotel predicament was a gossamer trouble—a silly, trivial, almost comic episode, something that could be explained away.

But this man—he had lived his life, whatever it was like, and now he was in the presence of his Maker. What kind of man had he been?

Her meditations were broken by an abrupt sound. It was that of a pair of heavy boots being thrown down by the door outside. She started, thinking at first it was someone knocking or trying to get in. She heard the "boots," however, stamping away down the corridor, and the realization stabbed her with the truth of her own position. She mustn't stop there. The necessity to get out was even more urgent.

To be found in a strange man's bedroom in the night is bad enough, but to be found in a dead man's bedroom was even worse. They would accuse her of murder, perhaps. Yes, that would be it—how could she possibly explain to these foreigners? Good God! they would hang her. No, guillotine her, that's what they do in France. They would chop her head off with a great steel knife. Merciful heavens! She envisaged herself standing blindfold by a priest and an executioner in a red cap, like that man in the Dickens's story—what was his name? . . . Sydney Carton, that was it, and before he went on the scaffold he said:

"It is a far, far better thing that I do than I have ever done."

But no, she couldn't say that. It would be a far, far worse thing that she did. What about the dear Dean? Her sister-in-law arriving alone from Paraguay to-morrow? All her dear people and friends in Easingstoke? Her darling Tony, the large gray tabby cat? It was her duty not to have her head

chopped off if it could possibly be avoided. She could do no good in the room. She could not recall the dead to life. Her only mission was to escape. Any minute people might arrive. The chambermaid, the boots, the manager, the gendarmes. . . . Visions of gendarmes arriving armed with swords and note-books vitalized her almost exhausted energies. She was a desperate woman. Fortunately now she had not to worry about the light. She sprang once more at the door and tried to force it open with her fingers. The result hurt her and gave her pause. If she was to escape she must *think*, and think intensely. She mustn't do anything rash and silly, she must just think and plan calmly.

She examined the lock carefully. There was no keyhole, but there was a slip-bolt, so that the hotel guest could lock the door on the inside, but it couldn't be locked on the outside. Oh, why didn't this poor dear dead man lock his door last night? Then this trouble could not have happened. She could see the end of the steel pin. It was about half an inch down the hole. If any one was passing they must surely notice the handle sticking out too far the other side! She drew a hairpin out of her hair and tried to coax the pin back, but she only succeeded in pushing it a little farther in. She felt the colour leaving her face, and a strange feeling of faintness come over her.

She was fighting for her life; she mustn't give way. She darted round the room like an animal in a trap, her mind alert for the slightest crevice of escape.

The window had no balcony and there was a drop of five stories to the street below. Dawn was breaking. Soon the activities of the hotel and the city would begin. The thing must be accomplished before then.

She went back once more and stared at the lock. She stared at the dead man's property, his razors, and brushes, and writing materials. He appeared to have a lot of writing materials, pens and pencils and rubber and sealing-wax. . . . Sealing-wax!

Necessity is truly the mother of invention. It is in any case quite certain that Millicent Bracegirdle, who had never invented a thing in her life, would never have evolved the ingenious little device she did, had she not believed that her position was utterly desperate. For in the end this is what she did. She got together a box of matches, a candle, a bar of sealing-wax, and a hairpin. She made a little pool of hot sealing-wax, into which she dipped the end of the hairpin. Collecting a small blob on the end of it she thrust it into the hole, and let it adhere to the end of the steel pin. At the seventh attempt she got the thing to move. It took her just an hour and ten minutes to get that steel pin back into the room, and when at length it came far enough through for her to grip it with her finger-nails, she burst into tears through the sheer physical tension of the strain. Very, very carefully she pulled it through and holding it firmly with her left hand she fixed the knob with her right, then slowly turned it. The door opened!

The temptation to dash out into the corridor and scream with relief was almost irresistible, but she forbore. She listened; she peeped out. No one was about. With beating heart, she went out, closing the door inaudibly. She crept like a little mouse to the room next door, stole in and flung herself on her bed. Immediately she did so it flashed through her mind that *she had left her sponge-bag and towel in the dead man's room!*

In looking back upon her experience she always considered that that second expedition was the worst of all. She might have left the sponge-bag and towel there, only that the towel—she never used hotel towels—had neatly inscribed in the corner “M.B.”

With furtive caution she managed to retrace her steps. She reëntered the dead man's room, reclaimed her property and returned to her own. When this mission was accomplished she was indeed well-nigh spent. She lay on her bed and groaned feebly. At last she fell into a fevered sleep. . . .

It was eleven o'clock when she awoke and no one had been to disturb her. The sun was shining, and the experiences of the night appeared a dubious nightmare. Surely she had dreamt it all?

With dread still burning in her heart she rang the bell. After a short interval of time the chambermaid appeared. The girl's eyes were bright with some uncontrollable excitement. No, she had not been dreaming. This girl had heard something.

“Will you bring me some tea, please?”

“Certainly, madame.”

The maid drew back the curtains and fussed about the room. She was under a pledge of secrecy but she could contain herself no longer. Suddenly she approached the bed and whispered excitedly:

“Oh, madame, I have promised not to tell . . . but a terrible thing has happened. A man, a dead man, has been found in room 117—a guest. Please not to say I tell you. But they have all been here, the gendarmes, the doctors, the inspectors. Oh, it is terrible . . . terrible.”

The little lady in the bed said nothing. There was indeed nothing to say. But Marie Louise Laucrat was too full of emotional excitement to spare her.

“But the terrible thing is. . . . Do you know who he was, madame? They say it is Boldhu, the man wanted for the murder of Jean Carreton in the barn at Vincennes. They say he strangled her, and then cut her up in pieces and hid her in two barrels which he threw into the river. . . . Oh, but he was a bad man, madame, a terrible bad man . . . and he died in the room next door . . . suicide they think or was it an attack of the heart? . . . Remorse, some shock perhaps. . . . Did you say a *café complet*, madame?”

“No, thank you, my dear . . . just a cup of tea . . . strong tea. . . .”

“*Parfaitement*, madame.”

The girl retired, and a little later a waiter entered

the room with a tray of tea. She could never get over her surprise in this. It seemed so—well, indecorous for a man—although only a waiter—to enter a lady's bedroom. There was no doubt a great deal in what the dear Dean said. They were certainly very peculiar, these French people—they had most peculiar notions. It was not the way they behaved at Easingstoke. She got farther under the sheets, but the waiter appeared quite indifferent to the situation. He put the tray down and retired.

When he had gone she sat up and sipped her tea, which gradually warmed her. She was glad the sun was shining. She would have to get up soon. They said that her sister-in-law's boat was due to berth at one o'clock. That would give her time to dress comfortably, write to her brother, and then go down to the docks. Poor man! So he had been a murderer, a man who cut up the bodies of his victims . . . and she had spent the night in his bedroom! They were certainly a most—how could she describe it?—people. Nevertheless she felt a little glad that at the end she had been there to kneel and pray by his bedside. Probably nobody else had ever done that. It was very difficult to judge people. . . . Something at some time might have gone wrong. He might not have murdered the woman after all. People were often wrongly convicted. She herself. . . . If the police had found her in that room at three o'clock that morning. . . . It is that which takes place in the heart which counts.

One learns and learns. Had she not learnt that one can pray just as effectively lying under a bed as kneeling beside it? . . . Poor man!

She washed and dressed herself and walked calmly down to the writing-room. There was no evidence of excitement among the other hotel guests. Probably none of them knew about the tragedy except herself. She went to a writing table, and after profound meditation wrote as follows:

MY DEAR BROTHER,—

I arrived late last night after a very pleasant journey. Everyone was very kind and attentive, the manager was sitting up for me. I nearly lost my spectacle case in the restaurant car! But a kind old gentleman found it and returned it to me. There was a most amusing American child on the train. I will tell you about her on my return. The people are very pleasant, but the food is peculiar, nothing *plain and wholesome*. I am going down to meet Annie at one o'clock. How have you been keeping, my dear? I hope you have not had any further return of the bronchial attacks.

Please tell Lizzie that I remembered in the train on the way here that that large stone jar of marmalade that Mrs. Hunt made is behind those empty tins in the top shelf of the cupboard next to the coach house. I wonder whether Mrs. Butler was able to come to evensong after all? This is a nice hotel, but I think Annie and I will stay at the "Grand" to-night, as the bedrooms here are rather noisy. Well, my dear, nothing more till I return. Do take care of yourself.—Your loving sister,

MILLICENT.

Yes, she couldn't tell Peter about it, neither in the letter nor when she went back to him. It was her duty not to tell him. It would only distress him; she felt convinced of it. In this curious foreign



atmosphere the thing appeared possible, but in Easingstoke the mere recounting of the fantastic situations would be positively . . . indelicate. There was no escaping that broad general fact—she had spent a night in a strange man's bedroom. Whether he was a gentleman or a criminal, even whether he was dead or alive, did not seem to mitigate the jar upon her sensibilities, or rather it would not mitigate the jar upon the peculiarly sensitive relationship between her brother and herself. To say that she had been to the bathroom, the knob of the door-handle came off in her hand, she was too frightened to awaken the sleeper or scream, she got under the bed—well, it was all perfectly true. Peter would believe her, but—one simply could not conceive such a situation in Easingstoke deanery. It would create a curious little barrier between them, as though she had been dipped in some mysterious solution which alienated her. It was her duty not to tell.

She put on her hat, and went out to post the letter. She distrusted an hotel letter-box. One never knew who handled these letters. It was not a proper official way of treating them. She walked to the head post office in Bordeaux.

The sun was shining. It was very pleasant walking about amongst these queer excitable people, so foreign and different-looking—and the cafés already crowded with chattering men and women, and the flower stalls, and the strange odour of—what was it?

Salt? Brine? Charcoal? . . . A military band was playing in the square . . . very gay and moving. It was all life, and movement, and bustle . . . thrilling rather.

“I spent a night in a strange man’s bedroom.”

Little Miss Bracegirdle hunched her shoulders, murmured to herself and walked faster. She reached the post office and found the large metal plate with the slot for letters and “R.F.” stamped above it. Something official at last! Her face was a little flushed—was it the warmth of the day or the contact of movement and life?—as she put her letter into the slot. After posting it she put her hand into the slot and flicked it round to see that there were no foreign contraptions to impede its safe delivery. No, the letter had dropped safely in. She sighed contentedly and walked off in the direction of the docks to meet her sister-in-law from Paraguay.

## WHERE WAS WYCH STREET?

**I**N THE public bar of the "Wagtail," in Wapping, four men and a woman were drinking beer and discussing diseases. It was not a pretty subject, and the company was certainly not a handsome one. It was a dark November evening, and the dingy lighting of the bar seemed but to emphasize the bleak exterior. Drifts of fog and damp from without mingled with the smoke of shag. The sanded floor was kicked into a muddy morass not unlike the surface of the pavement. An old lady down the street had died from pneumonia the previous evening, and the event supplied a fruitful topic of conversation. The things that one could get! Everywhere were germs eager to destroy one. At any minute the symptoms might break out. And so—one foregathered in a cheerful spot amidst friends and drank forgetfulness.

Prominent in this little group was Baldwin Meadows, a sallow-faced villain with battered features and prominent cheek-bones, his face cut and scarred by a hundred fights. Ex-seaman, ex-boxer, ex-fish-porter—indeed, to everyone's knowledge, ex-everything. No one knew how he lived. By his side lurched an enormous coloured man who went

by the name of Harry Jones. Grinning above a tankard sat a pimply faced young man who was known as "the Agent." Silver rings adorned his fingers. He had no other name, and most emphatically no address, but he "arranged things" for people, and appeared to thrive upon it in a scrambling, fugitive manner. The other two people were Mr. and Mrs. Dawes. Mr. Dawes was an entirely negative person, but Mrs. Dawes shone by virtue of a high, whining, insistent voice, keyed to within half a note of hysteria.

Then, at one point, the conversation suddenly took a peculiar turn. It came about through Mrs. Dawes mentioning that her aunt, who died from eating tinned lobster, used to work in a corset shop in Wych Street. When she said that, "the Agent," whose right eye appeared to survey the ceiling, whilst his left eye looked over the other side of his tankard, remarked:

"Where was Wych Street, ma?"

"Lord!" exclaimed Mrs. Dawes. "Don't you know, dearie? You must be a young 'un, you must. Why, when I was a gal everyone knew Wych Street. It was just down there where they built the Kingsway, like."

Baldwin Meadows cleared his throat and said:

"Wych Street used to be a turnin' runnin' from Long Acre into Wellington Street."

"Oh, no, old boy," chipped in Mr. Dawes, who always treated the ex-man with great deference.

“If you’ll excuse me, Wych Street was a narrow lane at the back of the old Globe Theatre, that used to pass by the church.”

“I know what I’m talkin’ about,” growled Meadows.

Mrs. Dawes’s high nasal whine broke in:

“Hi, Mr. Booth, you used ter know yer wye abaht. Where was Wych Street?”

Mr. Booth, the proprietor, was polishing a tap. He looked up. “Wych Street? Yus, of course I knoo Wych Street. Used to go there with some of the boys when I was Covent Garden way. It was at right angles to the Strand, just east of Wellington Street.”

“No, it warn’t. It were alongside the Strand, before yer come to Wellington Street.”

The coloured man took no part in the discussion, one street and one city being alike to him, provided he could obtain the material comforts dear to his heart; but the others carried it on with a certain amount of acerbity.

Before any agreement had been arrived at three other men entered the bar. The quick eye of Meadows recognized them at once as three of what was known at that time as “The Gallows Ring.” Every member of “The Gallows Ring” had done time, but they still carried on a lucrative industry devoted to blackmail, intimidation, shop-lifting, and some of the clumsier recreations. Their leader, Ben Orming, had served seven years for bashing a Chinaman down at Rotherhithe.

“The Gallows Ring” was not popular in Wapping, for the reason that many of their depredations had been inflicted upon their own class. When Meadows and Harry Jones took it into their heads to do a little wild prancing they took the trouble to go up into the West End. They considered “The Gallows Ring” an ungentlemanly set; nevertheless, they always treated them with a certain external deference—an unpleasant crowd to quarrel with.

Ben Orming ordered beer for the three of them, and they leant against the bar and whispered in sullen accents. Something had evidently miscarried with the Ring. Mrs. Dawes continued to whine above the general drone of the bar. Suddenly she said:

“Ben, you’re a hot old devil, you are. We was just ’aving a discussion like. Where was Wych Street?”

Ben scowled at her, and she continued:

“Some sez it was one place, some sez it was another. I *know* where it was, ’cors my aunt what died from blood p’ison, after eatin’ tinned lobster, used to work at a corset shop. . . .”

“Yus,” barked Ben, emphatically. “I know where Wych Street was—it was just sarth of the river, afore yer come to Waterloo Station.”

It was then that the coloured man, who up to that point had taken no part in the discussion, thought fit to intervene.

“Nope. You’s all wrong, cap’n. Wych Street were alongside de church, way over where de Strand takes a side line up west.”

Ben turned on him fiercely.

“What the blazes does a blanketty nigger know abaht it? I’ve told yer where Wych Street was.”

“Yus, and I know where it was,” interposed Meadows. “Yer both wrong. Wych Street was a turning running from Long Acre into Wellington Street.”

“I didn’t ask yer what *you* thought,” growled Ben.

“Well, I suppose I’ve a right to an opinion?”

“You always think you know everything, you do.”

“You can just keep yer mouth shut.”

“It ’ud take more’n you to shut it.”

Mr. Booth thought it advisable at this juncture to bawl across the bar:

“Now, gentlemen, no quarrelling—please.”

The affair might have subsided at that point, but for Mrs. Dawes. Her emotions over the death of the old lady in the street had been so stirred that she had been, almost unconsciously, drinking too much gin. She suddenly screamed out:

“Don’t you take no lip from ’im, Mr. Medders. The dirty, thieving devil, ’e always thinks ’e’s goin’ to come it over everyone.”

She stood up threateningly, and one of Ben’s supporters gave her a gentle push backward. In three minutes the bar was in a complete state of pandemonium. The three members of “The Gallows Ring” fought two men and a woman, for Mr. Dawes merely stood in a corner and screamed out:

“Don’t! Don’t!”

Mrs. Dawes stabbed the man, who had pushed her,

through the wrist with a hatpin. Meadows and Ben Orming closed on each other and fought savagely with the naked fists. A lucky blow early in the encounter sent Meadows reeling against the wall, with blood streaming down his temple. Then the coloured man hurled a pewter tankard straight at Ben and it hit him on the knuckles. The pain maddened him to a frenzy. His other supporter had immediately got to grips with Harry Jones, and picked up one of the high stools and, seizing an opportunity, brought it down crash on to the coloured man's skull.

The whole affair was a matter of minutes. Mr. Booth was bawling out in the street. A whistle sounded. People were running in all directions.

"Beat it! Beat it, for God's sake!" called the man who had been stabbed through the wrist. His face was very white, and he was obviously about to faint.

Ben and the other man, whose name was Toller, dashed to the door. On the pavement there was a confused scramble. Blows were struck indiscriminately. Two policemen appeared. One was laid *hors de combat* by a kick on the knee-cap from Toller. The two men fled into the darkness, followed by a hue-and-cry. Born and bred in the locality, they took every advantage of their knowledge. They tacked through alleys and raced down dark mews, and clambered over walls. Fortunately for them, the people they passed, who might have tripped them up or aided in the pursuit, merely fled indoors.



The people in Wapping are not always on the side of the pursuer. But the police held on. At last Ben and Toller slipped through the door of a house in Aztec Street barely ten yards ahead of their nearest pursuer. Blows rained on the door, but they slipped the bolts, and then fell panting to the floor. When Ben could speak, he said:

“If they cop us, it means swinging.”

“Was the nigger done in?”

“I think so. But even if 'e wasn't, there was that other affair the night before last. The game's up.”

The ground floor rooms were shuttered and bolted, but they knew that the police would probably force the front door. At the back there was no escape, only a narrow stable yard, where lanterns were already flashing. The roof only extended thirty yards either way, and the police would probably take possession of it. They made a round of the house, which was sketchily furnished. There was a loaf, a small piece of mutton, and a bottle of pickles, and—the most precious possession—three bottles of whisky. Each man drank half a glass of neat whisky, then Ben said: “We'll be able to keep 'em quiet for a bit, anyway,” and he went and fetched an old twelve-bore gun and a case of cartridges. Toller was opposed to this last desperate resort, but Ben continued to murmur: “It means swinging, anyway.”

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And thus began the notorious siege of Aztec Street, It lasted three days and four nights. You may remember that, on forcing a panel of the front door Sub-Inspector Wraith, of the V Division, was shot through the chest. The police then tried other methods. A hose was brought into play, without effect. Two policemen were killed and four wounded. The military was requisitioned. The street was picketed. Snipers occupied windows of the houses opposite. A distinguished member of the Cabinet drove down in a motor-car, and directed operations in a top-hat. It was the introduction of poison gas which was the ultimate cause of the downfall of the citadel. The body of Ben Orming was never found, but that of Toller was discovered near the front door, with a bullet through his heart.

The medical officer to the court pronounced that the man had been dead three days, but whether killed by a chance bullet from a sniper or whether killed deliberately by his fellow-criminal was never revealed. For when the end came Orming had apparently planned a final act of venom. It was known that in the basement a considerable quantity of petrol had been stored. The contents had probably been carefully distributed over the most inflammable materials in the top rooms. The fire broke out, as one witness described it, "almost like an explosion." Orming must have perished in this. The roof blazed up, and the sparks carried across the yard and started a stack of light timber in the annex of Messrs.

Morrel's piano factory. The factory and two blocks of tenement buildings were burnt to the ground. The estimated cost of the destruction was one hundred and eighty thousand pounds. The casualties amounted to seven killed and fifteen wounded.

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At the inquiry held under Justice Pengammon, various odd, interesting facts were revealed. Mr. Lowes-Parlby, the brilliant young K.C., distinguished himself by his searching cross-examination of many witnesses. At one point a certain Mrs. Dawes was put in the box.

"Now," said Mr. Lowes-Parlby, "I understand that on the evening in question, Mrs. Dawes, you, and the victims, and these other people who have been mentioned, were all seated in the public bar of the 'Wagtail,' enjoying its no doubt excellent hospitality and indulging in a friendly discussion. Is that so?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, will you tell his lordship what you were discussing?"

"Diseases, sir."

"Diseases! And did the argument become acrimonious?"

"Pardon?"

"Was there a serious dispute about diseases?"

"No, sir."

“Well, what was the subject of the dispute?”

“We was arguin’ as to where Wych Street was, sir.”

“What’s that?” said his lordship.

“The witness states, my lord, that they were arguing as to where Wych Street was.”

“Wych Street? Do you mean W-Y-C-H?”

“Yes, sir.”

“You mean the narrow old street that used to run across the site of what is now the Gaiety Theatre?”

Mr. Lowes-Parlby smiled in his most charming manner.

“Yes, my lord, I believe the witness refers to the same street you mention, though, if I may be allowed to qualify your lordship’s description of the locality, may I suggest that it was a little farther east—at the side of the old Globe Theatre, which was adjacent to St. Martin’s in the Strand? That is the street you were all arguing about, isn’t it, Mrs. Dawes?”

“Well, sir, my aunt, who died from eating tinned lobster, used to work at a corset shop. I ought to know.”

His lordship ignored the witness. He turned to the counsel rather peevishly:

“Mr. Lowes-Parlby, when I was your age I used to pass through Wych Street every day of my life. I did so for nearly twelve years. I think it hardly necessary for you to contradict me.”

The counsel bowed. It was not his place to dispute with a justice, although that justice be a hope-

less old fool; but another eminent K.C., an elderly man with a tawny beard, rose in the body of the court, and said:

“If I may be allowed to interpose, your lordship, I also spent a great deal of my youth passing through Wych Street. I have gone into the matter, comparing past and present ordnance survey maps. If I am not mistaken, the street the witness was referring to began near the hoarding at the entrance to Kingsway and ended at the back of what is now the Aldwych Theatre.”

“Oh, no, Mr. Backer!” exclaimed Lowes-Parlby.

His lordship removed his glasses and snapped out:

“The matter is entirely irrelevant to the case.”

It certainly was, but the brief passage-of-arms left an unpleasant tang of bitterness behind. It was observed that Mr. Lowes-Parlby never again quite got the prehensile grip upon his cross-examination that he had shown in his treatment of the earlier witnesses. The coloured man, Harry Jones, had died in hospital, but Mr. Booth, the proprietor of the “Wagtail,” Baldwin Meadows, Mr. Dawes and the man who was stabbed in the wrist, all gave evidence of a rather nugatory character. Lowes-Parlby could do nothing with it. The findings of this special inquiry do not concern us. It is sufficient to say that the witnesses already mentioned all returned to Wapping. The man who had received the thrust of a hatpin through his wrist did not think it advisable to take any action against Mrs. Dawes. He was

pleasantly relieved to find that he was only required as a witness of an abortive discussion.

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In a few weeks' time the great Aztec Street siege remained only a romantic memory to the majority of Londoners. To Lowes-Parlby the little dispute with Justice Pengammon rankled unreasonably. It is annoying to be publicly snubbed for making a statement which you know to be absolutely true, and which you have even taken pains to verify. And Lowes-Parlby was a young man accustomed to score. He made a point of looking everything up, of being prepared for an adversary thoroughly. He liked to give the appearance of knowing everything. The brilliant career just ahead of him at times dazzled him. He was one of the darlings of the gods. Everything came to Lowes-Parlby. His father had distinguished himself at the Bar before him, and had amassed a modest fortune. He was an only son. At Oxford he had carried off every possible degree. He was already being spoken of for very high political honours.

But the most sparkling jewel in the crown of his successes was Lady Adela Charters, the daughter of Lord Vermeer, the Minister for Foreign Affairs. She was his *fiancée*, and it was considered the most brilliant match of the season. She was young and almost pretty, and Lord Vermeer was immensely wealthy and one of the most influential men in Great Britain. Such a combination was irresistible. There

seemed to be nothing missing in the life of Francis Lowes-Parlby, K.C.

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One of the most regular and absorbed spectators at the Aztec Street inquiry was old Stephen Garrit. Stephen Garrit held a unique but quite inconspicuous position in the legal world at that time. He was a friend of judges, a specialist at various abstruse legal rulings, a man of remarkable memory, and yet—an amateur. He had never taken silk, never eaten the requisite dinners, never passed an examination in his life; but the law of evidence was meat and drink to him. He passed his life in the Temple, where he had chambers. Some of the most eminent counsel in the world would take his opinion, or come to him for advice. He was very old, very silent and very absorbed. He attended every meeting of the Aztec Street inquiry, but from beginning to end he never volunteered an opinion.

After the inquiry was over, he went and visited an old friend at the London Survey Office. He spent two mornings examining maps. After that he spent two mornings pottering about the Strand, Kingsway and Aldwych; then he worked out some careful calculations on a ruled chart. He entered the particulars in a little book which he kept for purposes of that kind, and then retired to his chambers to study other matters. But, before doing so, he entered a little apophthegm in another book. It was apparently a book in

which he intended to compile a summary of his legal experiences. The sentence ran:

“The basic trouble is that people make statements without sufficient data.”

Old Stephen need not have appeared in this story at all, except for the fact that he was present at the dinner at Lord Vermeer's, where a rather deplorable incident occurred. And you must acknowledge that in the circumstances it is useful to have such a valuable and efficient witness.

Lord Vermeer was a competent, forceful man, a little quick-tempered and autocratic. He came from Lancashire, and before entering politics had made an enormous fortune out of borax, artificial manure, and starch.

It was a small dinner party, with a motive behind it. His principal guest was Mr. Sandeman, the London agent of the Ameer of Bakkan. Lord Vermeer was very anxious to impress Mr. Sandeman and to be very friendly with him: the reasons will appear later. Mr. Sandeman was a self-confessed cosmopolitan. He spoke seven languages and professed to be equally at home in any capital in Europe. London had been his headquarters for over twenty years. Lord Vermeer also invited Mr. Arthur Toombs, a colleague in the Cabinet, his prospective son-in-law, Lowes-Parlby, K.C., James Trolley, a very tame Socialist M.P., and Sir Henry and Lady Breyd, the two latter being invited, not because Sir Henry was of any use, but because Lady Breyd was a pretty



and brilliant woman who might amuse his principal guest. The sixth guest was Stephen Garrit.

The dinner was a great success. When the succession of courses eventually came to a stop, and the ladies had retired, Lord Vermeer conducted his male guests into another room for a ten minutes' smoke before rejoining them. It was then that the unfortunate incident occurred. There was no love lost between Lowes-Parlby and Mr. Sandeman. It is difficult to ascribe the real reason of their mutual animosity, but on the several occasions when they had met there had invariably passed a certain sardonic by-play. They were both clever, both comparatively young, each a little suspect and jealous of the other; moreover, it was said in some quarters that Mr. Sandeman had had intentions himself with regard to Lord Vermeer's daughter, that he had been on the point of a proposal when Lowes-Parlby had butted in and forestalled him.

Mr. Sandeman had dined well, and he was in the mood to dazzle with a display of his varied knowledge and experiences. The conversation drifted from a discussion of the rival claims of great cities to the slow, inevitable removal of old landmarks. There had been a slightly acrimonious disagreement between Lowes-Parlby and Mr. Sandeman as to the claims of Budapest and Lisbon, and Mr. Sandeman had scored because he extracted from his rival a confession that, though he had spent two months in Budapest, he had only spent two days in Lisbon.

Mr. Sandeman had lived for four years in either city. Lowes-Parlby changed the subject abruptly.

“Talking of landmarks,” he said, “we had a queer point arise in that Aztec Street Inquiry. The original dispute arose owing to a discussion between a crowd of people in a pub. as to where Wych Street was.”

“I remember,” said Lord Vermeer. “A perfectly absurd discussion. Why, I should have thought that any man over forty would remember exactly where it was.”

“Where would you say it was, sir?” asked Lowes-Parlby.

“Why, to be sure, it ran from the corner of Chancery Lane and ended at the second turning after the Law Courts, going west.”

Lowes-Parlby was about to reply, when Mr. Sandeman cleared his throat and said, in his supercilious, oily voice:

“Excuse me, my lord. I know my Paris, and Vienna, and Lisbon, every brick and stone, but I look upon London as my home. I know my London even better. I have a perfectly clear recollection of Wych Street. When I was a student I used to visit there to buy books. It ran parallel to New Oxford Street on the south side, just between it and Lincoln’s Inn Fields.”

There was something about this assertion that infuriated Lowes-Parlby. In the first place, it was so hopelessly wrong and so insufferably asserted. In the second place, he was already smarting under

the indignity of being shown up about Lisbon. And then there suddenly flashed through his mind the wretched incident when he had been publicly snubbed by Justice Pengammon about the very same point; and he knew that he was right each time. Damn Wych Street! He turned on Mr. Sandeman.

“Oh, nonsense! You may know something about these—eastern cities; you certainly know nothing about London if you make a statement like that. Wych Street was a little farther east of what is now the Gaiety Theatre. It used to run by the side of the old Globe Theatre, parallel to the Strand.”

The dark moustache of Mr. Sandeman shot upward, revealing a narrow line of yellow teeth. He uttered a sound that was a mingling of contempt and derision; then he drawled out:

“Really? How wonderful—to have such comprehensive knowledge!”

He laughed, and his small eyes fixed his rival. Lowes-Parlby flushed a deep red. He gulped down half a glass of port and muttered just above a whisper: “Damned impudence!” Then, in the rudest manner he could display, he turned his back deliberately on Sandeman and walked out of the room.

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In the company of Adela he tried to forget the little contretemps. The whole thing was so absurd—so utterly undignified. As though *he* didn't know! It was the little accumulation of pinpricks all arising

out of that one argument. The result had suddenly goaded him to—well, being rude, to say the least of it. It wasn't that Sandeman mattered. To the devil with Sandeman! But what would his future father-in-law think? He had never before given way to any show of ill-temper before him. He forced himself into a mood of rather fatuous jocularity. Adela was at her best in those moods. They would have lots of fun together in the days to come. Her almost pretty, not too clever, face was dimpled with kittenish glee. Life was a tremendous rag to her. They were expecting Toccata, the famous opera-singer. She had been engaged at a very high fee to come on from Covent Garden. Mr. Sandeman was very fond of music.

Adela was laughing and discussing which was the most honourable position for the great Sandeman to occupy. There came to Lowes-Parlby a sudden abrupt misgiving. What sort of wife would this be to him when they were not just fooling? He immediately dismissed the curious, furtive little stab of doubt. The splendid proportions of the room calmed his senses. A huge bowl of dark red roses quickened his perceptions. His career. . . . The door opened. But it was not La Toccata. It was one of the household flunkies. Lowes-Parlby turned again to his inamorata.

“Excuse me, sir. His lordship says will you kindly go and see him in the library?”

Lowes-Parlby regarded the messenger, and his

heart beat quickly. An incontrollable presage of evil racked his nerve centres. Something had gone wrong; and yet the whole thing was so absurd, trivial. In a crisis—well, he could always apologize. He smiled confidently at Adela, and said:

“Why, of course; with pleasure. Please excuse me, dear.”

He followed the impressive servant out of the room. His foot had barely touched the carpet of the library when he realized that his worst apprehensions were to be plumbed to the depths. For a moment he thought Lord Vermeer was alone, then he observed old Stephen Garrit, lying in an easy-chair in the corner like a piece of crumpled parchment. Lord Vermeer did not beat about the bush. When the door was closed, he bawled out, savagely:

“What the devil have you done?”

“Excuse me, sir. I’m afraid I don’t understand. Is it Sandeman. . . ?”

“Sandeman has gone.”

“Oh, I’m sorry.”

“Sorry! By God, I should think you might be sorry! You insulted him. My prospective son-in-law insulted him in my own house!”

“I’m awfully sorry. I didn’t realize. . . .”

“Realize! Sit down, and don’t assume for one moment that you continue to be my prospective son-in-law. Your insult was a most intolerable piece of effrontery, not only to him, but to me.”

“But I. . . .”

“Listen to me. Do you know that the Government were on the verge of concluding a most far-reaching treaty with that man? Do you know that the position was just touch-and-go? The concessions we were prepared to make would have cost the State thirty million pounds, and it would have been cheap. Do you hear that? It would have been cheap! Bakkan is one of the most vulnerable outposts of the Empire. It is a terrible danger zone. If certain Powers can usurp our authority—and, mark you, the whole blamed place is already riddled with this new pernicious doctrine—you know what I mean—before we know where we are the whole East will be in a blaze. India! My God! This contract we were negotiating would have countered this outward thrust. And you, you blockhead, you come here and insult the man upon whose word the whole thing depends.”

“I really can't see, sir, how I should know all this.”

“You can't see it! But, you fool, you seemed to go out of your way. You insulted him about the merest quibble—in my house!”

“He said he knew where Wych Street was. He was quite wrong. I corrected him.”

“Wych Street! Wych Street be damned! If he said Wych Street was in the moon, you should have agreed with him. There was no call to act in the way you did. And you—you think of going into politics!”

The somewhat cynical inference of this remark

went unnoticed. Lowes-Parlby was too unnerved. He mumbled:

“I’m very sorry.”

“I don’t want your sorrow. I want something more practical.”

“What’s that, sir?”

“You will drive straight to Mr. Sandeman’s, find him, and apologize. Tell him you find that he was right about Wych Street after all. If you can’t find him to-night, you must find him to-morrow morning. I give you till midday to-morrow. If by that time you have not offered a handsome apology to Mr. Sandeman, you do not enter this house again, you do not see my daughter again. Moreover, all the power I possess will be devoted to hounding you out of that profession you have dishonoured. Now you can go.”

Dazed and shaken, Lowes-Parlby drove back to his flat at Knightsbridge. Before acting he must have time to think. Lord Vermeer had given him till to-morrow midday. Any apologizing that was done should be done after a night’s reflection. The fundamental purposes of his being were to be tested. He knew that. He was at a great crossing. Some deep instinct within him was grossly outraged. Is it that a point comes when success demands that a man shall sell his soul? It was all so absurdly trivial—a mere argument about the position of a street that had ceased to exist. As Lord Vermeer said, what did it matter about Wych Street?

Of course he should apologize. It would hurt horribly to do so, but would a man sacrifice everything on account of some fooling argument about a street?

In his own rooms, Lowes-Parlby put on a dressing-gown, and, lighting a pipe, he sat before the fire. He would have given anything for companionship at such a moment—the right companionship. How lovely it would be to have—a woman, just the right woman, to talk this all over with; someone who understood and sympathized. A sudden vision came to him of Adela's face grinning about the prospective visit of *La Toccata*, and again the low voice of misgiving whispered in his ears. Would Adela be—just the right woman? In very truth, did he really love Adela? Or was it all—a rag? Was life a rag—a game played by lawyers, politicians, and people?

The fire burned low, but still he continued to sit thinking, his mind principally occupied with the dazzling visions of the future. It was past midnight when he suddenly muttered a low “Damn!” and walked to the bureau. He took up a pen and wrote:

DEAR MR. SANDEMAN,—

I must apologize for acting so rudely to you last night. It was quite unpardonable of me, especially as I since find, on going into the matter, that you were quite right about the position of Wych Street. I can't think how I made the mistake. Please forgive me.

Yours cordially,

FRANCIS LOWES-PARLBY.



Having written this, he sighed and went to bed. One might have imagined at that point that the matter was finished. But there are certain little greedy demons of conscience that require a lot of stilling, and they kept Lowes-Parlby awake more than half the night. He kept on repeating to himself, "It's all positively absurd!" But the little greedy demons pranced around the bed, and they began to group things into two definite issues. On the one side, the great appearances; on the other, something at the back of it all, something deep, fundamental, something that could only be expressed by one word—truth. If he had *really* loved Adela—if he weren't so absolutely certain that Sandeman was wrong and he was right—why should he have to say that Wych Street was where it wasn't?

"Isn't there, after all," said one of the little demons, "something which makes for greater happiness than success? Confess this, and we'll let you sleep."

Perhaps that is one of the most potent weapons the little demons possess. However full our lives may be, we ever long for moments of tranquillity. And conscience holds before our eyes the mirror of an ultimate tranquillity. Lowes-Parlby was certainly not himself. The gay, debonair, and brilliant egoist was tortured, and tortured almost beyond control; and it had all apparently arisen through the ridiculous discussion about a street. At a quarter past three in the morning he arose from his bed with a

groan, and, going into the other room, he tore the letter to Mr. Sandeman to pieces.

\* \* \* \* \*

Three weeks later old Stephen Garrit was lunching with the Lord Chief Justice. They were old friends, and they never found it incumbent to be very conversational. The lunch was an excellent, but frugal, meal. They both ate slowly and thoughtfully, and their drink was water. It was not till they reached the dessert stage that his lordship indulged in any very informative comment, and then he recounted to Stephen the details of a recent case in which he considered that the presiding judge, by an unprecedented paralogy, misinterpreted the Law of Evidence. Stephen listened with absorbed attention. He took two cob-nuts from the silver dish, and turned them over meditatively, without cracking them. When his lordship had completely stated his opinion and peeled a pear, Stephen mumbled:

“I have been impressed, very impressed indeed. Even in my own field of—limited observation—the opinion of an outsider, you may say—so often it happens—the trouble caused by an affirmation without sufficiently established data. I have seen lives lost, ruin brought about, endless suffering. Only last week, a young man—a brilliant career—almost shattered. People make statements without——”

He put the nuts back on the dish and then, in an apparently irrelevant manner, he said abruptly:

“Do you remember Wych Street, my lord?”

The Lord Chief Justice grunted.

“Wych Street! Of course I do.”

“Where would you say it was, my lord?”

“Why, here, of course.”

His lordship took a pencil from his pocket and sketched a plan on the tablecloth.

“It used to run from there to here.”

Stephen adjusted his glasses and carefully examined the plan. He took a long time to do this, and when he had finished his hand instinctively went toward a breast pocket where he kept a notebook with little squared pages. Then he stopped and sighed. After all, why argue with the law? The law was like that—an excellent thing, not infallible, of course (even the plan of the Lord Chief Justice was a quarter of a mile out), but still an excellent, a wonderful thing. He examined the bony knuckles of his hands and yawned slightly.

“Do you remember it?” said the Lord Chief Justice.

Stephen nodded sagely, and his voice seemed to come from a long way off:

“Yes, I remember it, my lord. It was a melancholy little street.”

## THE OCTAVE OF JEALOUSY

### I

**A** TRAMP came through a cutting by old Jerry Shindle's nursery, and crossing the stile, stepped into the glare of the white road. He was a tall swarthy man with stubbly red whiskers which appeared to conceal the whole of his face, except a small portion under each eye about the size of a two shilling piece. His skin showed through the rents in a filthy old black green garment, and was the same colour as his face, a livid bronze. His toes protruded from his boots, which seemed to be home-made contraptions of canvas and string. He carried an ash stick, and the rest of his worldly belongings in a spotted red and white handkerchief. His worldly belongings consisted of some rags, a door-knob, a portion of a foot-rule, a tin mug stolen from a workhouse, half a dozen date stones, a small piece of very old bread, a raw onion, the shutter of a camera, and two empty matchboxes.

He looked up and down the road as though uncertain of his direction. To the north it curved under the wooded opulence of Crawshay Park. To the south it stretched like a white ribbon across a

bold vista of shadeless downs. He was hungry and he eyed, critically, the potential possibilities of a cottage standing back from the road. It was a shabby little three-roomed affair with fowls running in and out of the front door, some washing on a line, and the sound of a child crying within. While he was hesitating, a farm labourer came through a gate to an adjoining field, and walked toward the cottage. He, too, carried property tied up in a red handkerchief. His other hand balanced a steel fork across his left shoulder. He was a thick-set, rather dour-looking man. As he came up the tramp said:

“Where does this road lead to, mate?”

The labourer replied brusquely:

“Pondhurst.”

“How far?”

“Three and a half miles.”

Without embroidering this information any further he walked stolidly across the road and entered the garden of the cottage. The tramp watched him put the fork down by the lintel of the door. He saw him enter the cottage, and he heard a woman's voice. He sighed and muttered into his stubbly red beard: “Lucky devil!” Then, hunching his shoulders, he set out with long flat-footed strides down the white road which led across the downs.

## II

HAVING kicked some mud off his boots, the labourer, Martin Crosby, said to his wife:

“Dinner ready?”

Emma Crosby was wringing out some clothes. Her face was shiny with the steam and the heat of the day. She answered petulantly:

“No, it isn’t. You’ll have to wait another ten minutes, the ’taters aren’t cooked. I’ve enough to do this morning I can tell yer, what with the washing, and Lizzie screaming with her teeth, and the biler going wrong.”

“Ugh! There’s allus somethin’.”

Martin knew there was no appeal against delay. He had been married four years; he knew his wife’s temper and mode of life sufficiently well. He went out into the garden and lighted his pipe. The fowls clucked round his feet and he kicked them away. He, too, was hungry. However, there would be food of a sort—in time. Some greasy pudding and potatoes boiled to a liquid mash, a piece of cheese perhaps. Well, there it was. When you work in the open air all day you can eat anything. The sun was pleasant on his face, the shag pungent and comforting. If only old Emma weren’t such a muddler! A good enough piece of goods when at her best, but always in a muddle, always behind time, no management, and then resentful because things went wrong. Lizzie: seven months old and two teeth through already and another coming. A lovely child, the spit and image of—what her mother must have been. Next time it would be a boy. Life wasn’t so bad—really.

The gate clicked, and the tall figure of Ambrose Baines appeared. He was dressed in a corduroy coat and knickers, stout brown gaiters and square thick boots. Tucked under his arm was a gun with its two barrels pointing at the ground. He was the gamekeeper to Sir Septimus Letter. He stood just inside the gate and called out:

“Mornin’, Martin.”

Martin replied: “Mornin’.”

“I was just passin’. The missus says you can have a cookin’ or so of runner beans if you wants ’em. We’ve got more than enough, and I hear as yours is blighty.”

“Oh! . . . ay, thank’ee.”

“Middlin’ hot to-day.”

“Ay . . . terrible hot.”

“When’ll you be comin’?”

“I’ll stroll over now. There’s nowt to do. I’m waitin’ dinner. I ’specks it’ll be a half-hour or so. You know what Emm is.”

He went inside and fetched a basket. He said nothing to his wife, but rejoined Baines in the road. They strolled through the cutting and got into the back of the gamekeeper’s garden just inside the wood. Martin went along the row and filled his basket. Baines left him and went into his cottage. He could hear Mrs. Baines singing and washing up.

Of course *they* had had their dinner. It would be like that. Mrs. Baines was a marvel. On one or

two occasions Martin had entered their cottage. Everything was spick and span, and done on time. The two children always seemed to be clean and quiet. There were pretty pink curtains and framed oleographs. Mrs. Baines could cook, and she led the hymns at church—so they said. Even the garden was neat, and trim, and fruitful. Of course *their* runner beans would be prolific whilst his failed. Mrs. Baines appeared at the door and called out:

“Mornin’, Mr. Crosby.”

He replied gruffly: “Mornin’, Mrs. Baines.”

“Middlin’ hot.”

“Ay . . . terrible hot.”

She was not what you would call a pretty, attractive woman; but she was natty, competent, irrepressibly cheerful. She would make a shilling go as far as Emma would a pound. The cottage had five rooms, all in a good state of repair. The roof had been newly thatched. All this was done for him, of course, by his employer. He paid no rent; Martin had to pay five shillings a week, and then the roof leaked, and the boiler never worked properly—but perhaps that was Emm’s fault. He picked up his basket and strolled toward the outer gate. As he did so, he heard the two children laughing, and Baines’s voice joining in.

“Some people do have luck,” Martin murmured, and went back to his wife.



## III

Jack and Jill went up the hill  
To fetch a pail of water;  
Jack fell down and broke his crown  
And Jill came tumbling after!

IT WAS very pretty—the way Winny Baines sang that, balancing the smaller boy on her knee, and jerking him skyward on the last word. Not what the world would call a pretty woman, but pretty enough to Ambrose, with her clear skin, kind motherly eyes, and thin brown hair. Her voice had a quality which somehow always expressed her gentle and unconquerable nature.

“She’s too good for me,” Ambrose would think at odd moments. “She didn’t ought to be a game-keeper’s wife. She ought to be a lady—with carriages, and comforts, and well-dressed friends.”

The reflection would stir in him a feeling of sullen resentment, tempered with pride. She was a wonderful woman. She managed so well; she never complained. Of course, so far as the material necessities were concerned, there was enough and to spare. The cottage was comfortable, and reasonably well furnished—so far as he could determine. Of food there was abundance; game, rabbits, vegetables, eggs, fruit. The only thing he had to buy in the way of food was milk from the farm, and a few groceries from Mr. Meads’s shop. He paid nothing

for the cottage and yet—he would have liked to have made things better for Winny. His wages were small, and there were clothes to buy, all kinds of little incidental expenses. There never seemed a chance to save and soon there would be the boy's schooling.

In spite of the small income, Winny always managed to keep herself and the children neat and smart, and even to help others like the more unfortunate Crosbys. She did all the work of the cottage, the care of the children, the mending and washing, and still found time to make jam, to preserve fruit, to grow flowers, and to sing in the church choir. She was the daughter of a piano-tuner at Bladestone, and the glamour of this early connection always hung between Ambrose and herself. To him a piano-tuner appeared a remote and romantic figure. It suggested a world of concerts, theatres, and Bohemian life. He was never quite clear about the precise functions of a piano-tuner, but he regarded his wife as the daughter of a public man, coming from a world far removed from the narrow limits of the life she was forced to lead with him.

In spite of her repeated professions of happiness, Ambrose always felt a shade suspicious, not of her, but of his own ability to satisfy her every demand. Sometimes he would observe her looking round the little rooms, as though she were visualizing what they might contain. Perhaps she wanted a grand piano, or some inlaid chairs, or embroidered coverings. He had not the money to buy these things,

and he knew that she would never ask for them; but still it was there—that queer gnawing sense of insecurity. At dawn he would wander through the coppices, drenched in dew, the gun under his arm, and the dog close to heel. The sunlight would come rippling over the jewelled leaves, and little clumps of primroses and violets would reveal themselves. Life would be good then, and yet somehow—it was not Winny's life. Only through their children did they seem to know each other.

Jack and Jill went up the hill  
To fetch a pail of water;  
Jack fell down and broke his crown  
And Jill came tumbling after!

“Oo—Ambrose,” the other boy was tugging at his beard, when Winny spoke. He pretended to scream with pain before he turned to his wife.

“Yes, my dear?”

“Will you be passing Mr. Meads's shop? We have run out of candles.”

“Oh? Roight be, my love. I'll be nigh there afore sundown. I have to order seed from Crumblings.”

He was later than he expected at Mr. Meads's shop. He had to wait whilst several women were being served. The portly owner's new cash register went “tap-tapping!” five times before he got a chance to say:

“Evenin', Mr. Meads, give us a pound of candles, will ye?”

Mrs. Meads came in through a parlour at the back, in a rustling black dress. She was going to a welfare meeting at the vicar's. She said:

"Good evening, Mr. Baines, hope you are all nicely."

A slightly disturbing sight met the eye of Ambrose. The parlour door was open, and he could see a maid in a cap and apron clearing away tea things in the gaily furnished room. The Meads had got a servant! He knew that Meads was extending his business. He had a cheap clothing department now, and he was building a shed out at the back with the intention of supplying petrol to casual motorists, but—a servant!

He picked up his packet of candles and muttered gruffly:

"Good evenin'."

Before he had reached the door he heard "Tapping!" *His* one and twopence had gone into the box. As he swung down the village street, he muttered to himself:

"God! I wish I had his money!"

#### IV

WHEN Mrs. Meads returned from the welfare meeting at half-past eight, she found Mr. Meads waiting for her in the parlour, and the supper laid. There was cold veal and beetroot, apple pie, cheese and stout.

"I'm sorry I'm late, dear," she said.

"That's all right, my love," replied Mr. Meads, not looking up from his newspaper.

"We had a lovely meeting—Mrs. Wonnicot was there, and Mrs. Beal, and Mrs. Edwin Pillcreak, and Mrs. James, and Ada, and both the Jamiesons, and the Vicar was perfectly sweet. He made two lovely speeches."

"Oh, that was nice," said Mr. Meads, trying to listen and read a piquant paragraph about a divorce case at the same time.

"I should think you want your supper."

"I'm ready when you are, my love."

Mr. Meads put down his newspaper, and drawing his chair up to the table, began to set about the veal. He was distinctly a man for his victuals. He carved rapidly for her, and less rapidly for himself. From this you must not imagine that he treated his wife meanly. On the contrary, he gave her a large helping, but a close observer could not help detecting that when carving for himself he seemed to take more interest in his job. Then he rang a little tinkly hand-bell and the new maid appeared.

"Go into the shop, my dear," he said, "and get me a pot of pickled walnuts from the second shelf on the left before you come to them bales of calico."

The maid went, and Mrs. Meads clucked:

"Um—being a bit extravagant to-night, John."

"The labourer is worthy of his hire," quoted Mr. Meads sententiously. He put up a barrage of veal in the forefront of his mouth—he had no back teeth,

but managed to penetrate it with an opaque rumble of sound. "Besides we had a good day to-day—done a lot of business. Pass the stout——"

"I'm glad to hear it," replied Mrs. Meads. "It's about time things began to improve, considerin' what we've been through. Mrs. Wonnicott was wearin' her biscuit-coloured taffeta with a new lace yoke. She looked smart, but a bit stiff for the Welfare to my way of thinkin'."

"Ah!" came rumbling through the veal.

"Oh, and did I tell you Mrs. Mounthead was there, too? She was wearing her starched ninon—no end of a swell she looked."

Mr. Meads's eyes lighted with a definite interest at last. Mrs. Mounthead was the wife of James Mounthead, the proprietor of that handsome hostelry, "The Die is Cast." When his long day's work was over Mr. Meads would not infrequently pop into "The Die is Cast" for an hour or so before closing time and have a long chat with Mr. James Mounthead. He swallowed half a glass of stout at a gulp, and helped himself liberally to the pickled walnuts which the maid had just brought in. Eyeing the walnuts thoughtfully, he said:

"Oh, so she's got into it, too, has she?"

"Yes, she's really quite a pleasant body. She told me coming down the street that her husband has just bought Bolder's farm over at Pondhurst. He's setting up his son there who's marrying Kate Steyning. Her people have got a bit of money, too,

so they'll be all right. By the way, we haven't heard from Charlie for nearly three weeks."

Mr. Meads sighed. Why were women always like that? There was Edie. He was trying to tell her that things were improving, going well in fact. The shed for petrol and motor accessories was nearly finished; the cheap clothing department was in full swing; he had indulged in pickled walnuts for supper (her supper, too); and there she must needs talk about—Charlie! Everybody in the neighbourhood knew that their son Charlie was up in London, and not doing himself or anybody else any good. And almost in the same breath she must needs talk about old Mounthead's son. Everyone knew that young Mounthead was a promising, industrious fellow. Oh! and so James had bought him Bolder's farm, had he? That cost a pretty penny, he knew. Just bought a farm, had he? Not put the money into his business; just bought it in the way that he, Sam Meads, might buy a gramophone, or an umbrella. Psaugh!

"I don't want no tart," he said, on observing Edie begin to carve it.

"No tart!" she exclaimed. "Why, what's wrong?"

"Oh, I don't know," he replied. "Don't feel like it—working too hard—bit flatulent. I'll go out for a stroll after supper."

An hour later he was leaning against the bar of "The Die is Cast," drinking gin and water, and listening to Mr. Mounthead discourse on dogs. The bar of "The Die is Cast" was a self-constituted

village club. Other cronies drifted in. They were all friends of both Mr. Meads and Mr. Mounthead. Mrs. Mounthead seldom appeared in the bar, but there was a potman and a barmaid named Florrie; and somewhere in the rear a cook, two housemaids, a scullerymaid, a boy for knives and boots, and an ostler. Mr. Mounthead had a victoria and a governess car, as well as a van for business purposes, a brown mare and a pony. He also had his own farm well stocked with pigs, cattle, and poultry. While taking his guests' money in a sleepy leisurely way, he regaled them with the rich fruits of his opinions and experiences. Later on he dropped casually that he was engaging an overseer at four hundred a year to take his son's place. And Mr. Meads glanced round the bar and noted the shining glass and pewter, the polished mahogany, the little pink and green glasses winking at him insolently.

"He doesn't know what work is either," suddenly occurred to him. Mr. Mounthead's work consisted mostly in a little bookkeeping, and in ordering people about. He only served in the shop as a kind of social relaxation. If he, Sam Meads, didn't serve in his shop himself all day from early morning till late evening, goodness knows what would happen to the business. Besides—the pettiness of it all! Little bits of cheese, penny tins of mustard, string, weighing out sugar and biscuits, cutting bacon, measuring off ribbons and calico, and flannelette. People gossiping all day, and running up little accounts it was



always hard to collect. But here—oh, the snappy quick profit. Everybody paying on the nail, served in a second, and what a profit! Enough to buy a farm for a son as though it was—an umbrella. Walking home, a little dejectedly, later on, he struck the road with his stick, and muttered:

“Damn that man!”

## v

MRS. JAMES MOUNTHEAD was rather pleased with her starched ninon. She leant back luxuriously in the easy chair, yawned, and pressed her hands along the sides of her well-fitting skirt. Gilt bangles round her wrists rattled pleasantly during this performance. A paste star glittered on her ample bosom. She heard James moving ponderously on the landing below; the bar had closed. He came puffily up the stairs and opened the door.

“A nightcap, queenie?” he wheezed through the creaking machinery of his respiratory organs.

Mrs. Mounthead smiled brightly. “I think I will to-night, Jim.”

He went to a cabinet and poured out two mixed drinks. He handed his wife one, and raising the other to his lips, said:

“Well, here’s to the boy!”

“Here’s to James the Second!” she replied, and drank deeply. Her eyes sparkled. Mrs. Mounthead was excited. The bangles clattered against the glass as she set it down.

“Come and give me a kiss, old dear,” she said, leaning back.

Without making any great show of enthusiasm, James did as he was bidden. He, too, was a little excited, but his excitement was less amorous than commercial. He had paid nearly twelve hundred pounds less for Bolder’s farm than he had expected. The news of his purchase was all over the neighbourhood. It had impressed everyone. People looked at him differently. He was becoming a big man, *the* big man in those parts. He could buy another farm to-morrow, and it wouldn’t break him. And the boy—the boy was a good boy; he would do well, too.

A little drink easily affected Mrs. Mounthead. She became garrulous.

“I had a good time at the Welfare, though some of the old cats didn’t like me, I know. Ha, ha, ha, what do I care? We could buy the whole lot up if we wanted to, except perhaps the Wonnicotts. Mine was the only frock worth a tinker’s cuss. Lord! You should have seen old Mrs. Meads! Looked like a washerwoman on a Sunday. The vicar was ever so nice. He called me madam, and said he ’oped I often come. I gave a fiver to the fund. Ha, ha, ha, I didn’t tell ’em that I made it backing ‘Ringcross’ for the Nunhead Stakes yesterday! They’d have died.”

During this verbal explosion, James Mounthead thoughtfully regarded his glass. And he thought to

himself: "Um. It's a pity Queenie gives herself away sometimes." He didn't particularly want to hear about the Welfare. He wanted to talk about "James the Second" and the plans for the future. He wanted to indulge in the luxury of talking about their success, but he didn't want to boast about wealth in quite that way. He had queer ambitions not unconnected with the land he lived on. He had not always been in the licensing trade. His father had been a small landed proprietor and a stock breeder; a man of stern, unrelenting principles. From his father he, James Mounthead, had inherited a kind of reverence for the ordered development of land and cattle, an innate respect for the sanctity of tradition, caste, property and fair dealing. His wife had always been in the licensing trade. She was the daughter of a publican at Pondhurst. As a girl she had served in the bar. All her relations were licensing people. When she had a little to drink—she was apt to display her worst side, to give herself away. James sighed.

"Did Mrs. Wonnicott say anything about her husband?" he asked, to change the subject.

"You bet she did. Tried to put it across us—when I told her about us buying Bolder's farm—said her old man had thought of bidding for it, but he knew it was poor in root crops and the soil was no good for corn, and that Sturge had neglected the place too long. The old cat! I said: 'Yes, and p'raps it wouldn't be convenient to pay for it just

now, after 'aving bought a lawn mower!' Ha, ha, ha. He, he, he. O my!"

"I shouldn't have said that," mumbled Mr. Mounthead, who knew, however, that anything was better than one of Queenie's violent reactions to quarrelsomeness. "Come on, let's go and turn in, old girl."

An hour later, James Mounthead was tossing restlessly between the sheets. Queenie's reference to the Wonnicotts had upset him. He could read between what she had said sufficiently to envisage a scene, which he himself deplored. Queenie, of course, had given herself away again to Mrs. Wonnicott. He knew that both the Wonnicotts despised her, and through her, him. He had probably as much money as Lewis Wonnicott, if not more. He certainly had a more fluid and accumulative way of making it, but there the matter stopped. Wonnicott was a gentleman; his wife a lady. He, James, might have been as much a gentleman as Wonnicott if—circumstances had been different. Queenie could never be a lady in the sense that Mrs. Wonnicott was a lady. Wonnicott led the kind of life *he* would like to live—a gentleman farmer, with hunters, a little house property, and some sound vested interests; a man with a great knowledge of land, horses, finance, and politics.

He loved Queenie in a queer enduring kind of way. She had been loyal to him, and she satisfied most of his needs. She loved him, but he knew that he

could never attain the goal of his vague ambitions, with her clinging to his heels. He thought of Lewis Wonnicot sleeping in his white panelled bedroom with chintz curtains and old furniture, and his wife in the adjoining room, where the bay window looked out on to the downs; and the heart of James became bitter with envy.

## VI

“I DON’T think I shall attend those Welfare meetings any more,” remarked Mrs. Lewis Wonnicot with a slight drawl. She gathered up her letters from the breakfast table and walked to the window.

In the garden below, Leach, the gardener, was experimenting with a new mower on the well-clipped lawns. The ramblers on the pergola were at their best. Her husband in a broad check suit and a white stock, looked up from *The Times* and said:

“Oh, how is that, my dear?”

“They are getting such awful people in. That dreadful woman, the wife of Mounthead, the publican, has joined.”

“Old Mounthead’s all right—not a bad sort. He knows a gelding from a blood mare.”

“That may be, but his wife is the limit. I happened to say something about the new mower, and she was simply rude. An awful vulgar person, wears spangles, and boasts about the money her husband makes out of selling whisky.”

“By gad! I bet he does, too. I wouldn’t mind

having a bit in his pub. Do you see Canadian Pacifics are still stagnant?"

"Lewis, I sometimes wish you wouldn't be so material. You think about nothing but money."

"Oh, come, my dear, I'm interested in a crowd of other things—things which I don't make money out of, too."

"For instance?"

"The land, the people who work on it, horses, cattle, game, the best way to do things for everybody. Besides, ain't I interested in the children? The two girls' careers at Bedales? Young Ralph at Rugby and going up to Cambridge next year?"

"You know they're there, but how much interest you take, I couldn't say."

"What is it you want me to do, my dear?"

"I think you might bestir yourself to get amongst better people. The girls will be leaving school soon and coming home. We know no one, no one at all in the neighbourhood."

"No one at all! Jeminy! Why, we know everyone!"

"You spend all your time among horse-breeders and cattle-dealers, and people like Mounthead, and occasionally call on the Vicar, but who is there of any importance that we know?"

"Lord! What do you want? Do you want me to go and call at Crawshay Park, and ask Sir Septimus and Lady Letter to come and make up a four at bridge?"

“Don’t be absurd! You know quite well that the Letters are entirely inaccessible. He’s not only an M.P. and owner of half the newspapers in the country, but a millionaire. They entertain house parties of ministers and dukes, and even royalty. They can afford to ignore even the county people themselves. But there are others. We don’t even know the county.”

“Who, for instance?”

“Well, the Burnabys. You met St. John Burnaby at the Constitutional Club two or three times and yet you have never attempted to follow it up. They’re very nice people and neighbours. And they have three boys all in the twenties, and the girl Sheila—she’s just a year younger than Ralph.”

“My word! Who’s being material now?”

“It isn’t material, it’s just—thinking of the children.”

“Women are wonderful,” muttered Lewis Wonnycott into his white stock, without raising his head. Mrs. Wonnycott swept to the door. Her thin lips were drawn in a firm straight line. Her refined hard little face appeared pinched and petulant. With her hand on the door-handle she said acidly:

“If you can spare half an hour from your grooms and pigs, I think you might at least do this to please me—call on Mrs. Burnaby to-day.”

And she went out of the room, shutting the door crisply.

“Oh, Jiminy-Piminy!” muttered Mr. Wonnycott. “Jiminy-Piminy!”

He stood up and shook himself. Then with feline intentness he walked quickly to the French window, and opening it walked down the steps into the garden. All the way to the sunk rose-garden he kept repeating, "Jiminy-Piminy!"

Once among the rose-bushes he lighted his pipe. (His wife objected to smoking in the house.) He blew clouds of tobacco smoke amongst imaginary green-fly. Occasionally he would glance furtively out at the view across the downs. Half buried amongst the elms near Basted Old Church he could just see the five red gables of the Burnabys's capacious mansion.

"I can't do it," he thought, "I can't do it, and I shall have to do it."

It was perfectly true he had been introduced to St. John Burnaby and had spoken to him once or twice. It was also true that Burnaby had never given any evidence of wishing to follow up the acquaintanceship. Bit of a swell, Burnaby, connected with all sorts of people, member of half a dozen clubs, didn't race but went in for golf, and had a shooting box in Scotland. Some said he had political ambitions, and meant to try for Parliament at the next election. He didn't racket round in a check suit and a white stock and mix with grooms and farm hands; he kept up the flair of the gentleman, the big man, even in the country. He had two cars, and three acres of conservatory, and peacocks, and a son in the diplomatic service, a daughter married



to a bishop. His wife, too, came of a poor but aristocratic family. Over at the "Five Gables" they kept nine gardeners and twenty odd servants. Everything was done tip-top.

Lewis Wonnicott turned and regarded his one old man gardener, trying the new mower, which Mrs. Mounthead had been so rude about to Dorothy. Poor Dorothy! She was touchy, that's what it was. Of course she *did* think of the children—no getting away from it. She was ambitious more for them than for herself or himself. She had given up being ambitious for him. He knew that she looked upon him as a slacker, a kind of cabbage. Well, perhaps he had been. He hadn't accomplished all he ought to. He had loved the land, the feel of horse-flesh, the smell of wet earth when the morning dews were on it. He had been a failure . . . a failure. He was not up to county people. He was unworthy of his dear wife's ambitions. Jiminy-Piminy! It would be a squeeze to send Ralph up to Cambridge next year!

He looked across the valley at the five red gables among the elms, and sighed.

"Lucky devil!" he murmured. "Damn it all! I suppose I must go."

## VII

"You don't seem to realize the importance of it," said Gwendolen St. John Burnaby as her husband leant forward on his seat on the terrace, and tickled the ear of Jinks, the Airedale. "A career in the

diplomatic service without influence is about as likely to be a success as a—*as a performance on a violin behind a sound-proof curtain.* There's Lal, wasting his—his talents and genius at that wretched little embassy at Oporto, and all you've got to do is to drive three miles to Crawshay Park and put the matter before Sir Septimus."

"These things always seem so simple to women," answered Sir John, a little peevishly.

"Well, isn't it true? Do you deny that he has the power?"

"Of course he has power, my dear, but you may not realize the kind of life a man like that lives. Every minute of the day is filled up, all kinds of important things crowding each other out. He's always been friendly enough to me, and yet every time I meet him I have an idea he has forgotten who I am. He deals in movements in which men are only pawns. If I told him about Lal he would say yes, he would do what he could—make a note of it, and forget about it directly I turned my back."

Mrs. St. John Burnaby stamped her elegant Louis heels.

"Is nothing ever worth trying?"

"Don't be foolish, Gwen, haven't I tried? Haven't I ambition?"

"For yourself, yes. I am thinking of Lal."

"Women always think of their sons before their husbands. He knows I've backed his party for all I'm worth. He knows I'm standing for the con-

stituency next time. When I get elected will be the moment. I shall then have a tiny atom of power. For a man without even a vote in Parliament do you think Letter is going to waste his time?"

"Obstinate!" muttered Mrs. Burnaby with metallic clearness. The little lines round the eyes and mouth of a face that had once been beautiful became accentuated in the clear sunlight. The constant stress of ambitious desires had quickened her vitality, but in the process had aged her body before its time. She knew that her husband was ambitious, too, but there was always just that little something he lacked in the great moments, just that little special effort that might have landed him among the gods—or in the House of Lords. He had been successful enough in a way. He had made money—a hundred thousand or so—in brokerage and dealing indirectly in various manufactured commodities; but he had not even attained a knighthood or a seat in Parliament. His heavy dark face betokened power and courage, but not vision. He was indeed as she had said—obstinate. In minnow circles he might appear a triton, but living within the same county as Sir Septimus Letter—Bah!

About to leave him, her movement was arrested by the approach of a butler followed by a gentleman in a check suit and a white stock, looking self-conscious.

Mrs. St. John Burnaby raised her lorgnette. "One of these local people," she reflected.

On being announced the gentleman in the check suit exclaimed rapidly:

“Excuse the liberty I take—neighbours, don’t you know. Remember me at the Constitutional, Mr. Burnaby? Thought I would drop in and pay my respects.”

St. John Burnaby nodded.

“Oh, yes, yes, quite. I remember, Mr.—er—Mr.——”

“Wonnicot.”

“Oh yes, of course. How do you do? My wife—Mr. Wonnicot.”

The wife and the Wonnicot bowed to each other, and there was an uncomfortable pause. At last Mr. Wonnicot managed to say:

“We live over at Wimpstone, just across the valley—my wife, the girls are at school, boy’s up at Rugby.”

“Oh yes—really?” This was Mrs. Burnaby, who was thinking to herself:

“The man looks like a dog fancier.”

“Very good school,” said St. John Burnaby. “Hot to-day, isn’t it!”

“Yes, it’s exceedingly warm.”

“Do you golf?”

“No, I don’t golf. I ride a bit.”

“You must excuse me,” said Mrs. St. John Burnaby, “I have got to get a trunk call to London.”

She fluttered away across the terrace, and into the house. Mr. Wonnicot chatted away for several

minutes, but St. John Burnaby was preoccupied and monosyllabic. The visitor was relieved to rescue his hat at last and make his escape. Walking down the drive he thought:

“It’s no good. He dislikes me.”

As a matter of fact St. John Burnaby was not thinking about him at all. He was thinking of Sir Septimus Letter, the big man, the power he would have liked to have been. He ground his teeth and clenched his fists:

“Damn it!” he muttered, “I will not appeal for young Lal. Let him fight his own battles.”

#### VIII

ON A certain day that summer when the sun was at its highest in the heavens, Sir Septimus Letter stood by the bureau in his cool library and conversed with his private secretary.

Sir Septimus was wearing what appeared to be a ready-made navy serge suit and a low collar. His hands were thrust into his trouser pockets. The sallow face was heavily marked, the strangely restless eyes peered searchingly beneath dark brows which almost met in one continuous line. The chin was finely modelled, but not too strong. It was not indeed what is usually known as a strong face. It had power, but of the kind which has been mellowed by the friction of every human experience. It had alert intelligence, a penetrating absorption, above all things it indicated vision. The speech and the move-

ments were incisive; the short wiry body a compact tissue of nervous energy. He listened with the watchful intensity of a dog at a rabbit-hole. Through the door at the end of the room could be heard the distant click of many typewriters.

The secretary was saying:

“The third reading of the Nationalization of Paper Industries Bill comes on at five-thirty, sir. Boneham will be up, and I do not think you will be called till seven. You will, of course, however, wish to hear what he has to say.”

“I know what he’ll say. You can cut that out, Roberts. Get Libby to give me a *précis* at six forty-five.”

“Very good, sir. Then there will be time after the Associated News Service Board at four to see the minister with regard to this question of packing meetings in East Riding. Lord Lampreys said he would be pleased if I could fix an appointment. He has some information.”

“Right. What line are Jennins and Castwell taking over this?”

“They’re trying to side-track the issue. They have every un-associated newspaper in the North against you.”

“H’m, h’m. Well, we’ve fought them before.”

“Yes, sir. The pressure is going to be greater this time, but everyone has confidence you will get them down.”

The little man’s eyes sparkled. “Roberts, get

through on the private wire to—Lambe; no, get through to all of them, and make it quite clear. This is not to be a party question. They're to work the unctious rectitude stuff, you know—liberty of the subject and so on."

"Very good, sir. The car comes at one-fifteen. You are lunching with Cranmer at Shorn Towers, the Canadian paper interests will be strongly represented there. I will be at Whitehall Court at three with the despatches. It would be advisable, if possible, to get Loeb of the finance committee. Oh, by the way, sir, I had to advise you from Loeb. They have received a cabled report of the expert's opinion from Labrador. There are two distinct seams of coal on that land you bought in '07. A syndicate from Buffalo have made an offer. They offer a million and a quarter dollars down."

What did we pay?"

"One hundred and twenty thousand."

"Don't sell."

"Very good, sir."

"Have you seen my wife, lately?"

"I have not seen Lady Letter for some days, sir. I believe she is at Harrogate."

The little man sighed, and drew out a cigarette case, opened it and offered one to Roberts, who accepted it with an elegant gesture. Then he snapped it to, and replaced it in his pocket.

"Damn it, Roberts, Reeves says I mustn't smoke."

“Oh, dear!—only a temporary disability I trust, sir.”

“Everything is temporary, Roberts.”

With his hands still in his pockets, he walked abstractedly out of the room. A little ormolu clock in the outer corridor indicated twenty minutes to one. The car was due at one-fifteen. Thirty-five minutes: oh, to escape for only that brief period! Through the glass doors he could see his sister, talking to two men in golfing clothes, some of the house party. The house party was a perpetual condition at Crawshay. He turned sharply to the right, and went through a corridor leading out to the rear of the garage. He hurried along and escaped to a path between two tomato houses. In a few moments he was lost to sight. He passed through a shrubbery, and came to a clearing. Without slackening his pace, he walked across it, and got amongst some trees. The trees of Crawshay Park—his trees! . . . He looked up at the towering oaks and elms. Were they his trees—because he had bought them? They were there years before he was born. They would be there years after his death. He was only passing through them—a fugitive. “Everything is temporary, Roberts——” Yes, even life itself. Jennins and Castwell! Of course they wanted to get him down! Were they the only ones? Does one struggle to the top without hurting others to get there? Does one get to the top without making enemies? Does one get to the top without suffering, and bitterness,



and remorse? The park sloped down to a low stone wall, with an opening where one could obtain a glorious view across the weald of Sussex. The white ribbon of a road stretched away into infinity.

As he stood there, he saw a dark swarthy figure clamber down a bank, and stand hesitating in the middle of the road. He was a tramp with a stubbly red beard nearly concealing his face, and a filthy black green suit. In his hand he carried a red handkerchief containing his worldly belongings—a door-knob, a portion of a foot-rule, a tin mug stolen from a workhouse, some date stones, an onion, the shutter of a camera, and two empty match boxes.

Sir Septimus did not know this fact; he merely regarded the tramp as an abstraction. He observed him hesitate, exchange a word with a field labourer, look up at the sky, hunch his shoulders, and suddenly set out with long swinging strides down the white road. Whither? There stirred within the breast of the millionaire a curious wistful longing. Oh, to be free! To be free! To walk across those hills without a care, without a responsibility. The figure, with its easy gait, fascinated him. The dark form became smaller and smaller, swallowed up in the immensity of nature. With a groan, Sir Septimus Letter buried his face in his hands and murmured:

“Lucky devil! . . . lucky devil! O God! If I could die. . . .”

## THE FUNNY MAN'S DAY

**H**IS round fat little face appeared seraphic in sleep. If only the hair were not graying at the temples and getting very, very thin on top, and the lines about the eyes and mouth becoming rather too accentuated, it might have been the head of one of Donatello's *bambini*. It was not until Mrs. Lamb, his ancient housekeeper, bustled into the room with a can and said: "Your water, Mr. Basingstoke"—the intrusion causing him to open his eyes—that it became apparent that he was a man past middle-age. His eyes were very large—"goose-gog eyes" the children called them. As elderly people will, it took him some few moments to focus his mentality. A child will wake up, and carry on from the exact instant it went to sleep; but it takes a middle-aged man or woman a moment or so to realize where they are, what day in the week it is, what happened yesterday, what is going to happen to-day, whether they are happy or not. Certainly with regard to the latter query there is always a subconscious pressure which warns them. Almost before they have decided which day in the week it is, a voice is whispering: "Something occurred yesterday to make you unhappy," or "Things are going

well. You are happy just now," and then the true realization of their affairs, and loves, and passions unfolds itself. They continue yesterday's story.

As to James Jasper Basingstoke, it was not his business to indulge in the slightest apprehension with regard to his condition of happiness or unhappiness. He was a funny man. It was his profession, his mission, his natural gift. From early morning, when his housekeeper awakened him, till, playing with the children—all the children adored him—practising, interviewing managers and costumiers, dropping into the club and exchanging stories with some of the other "dear old boys," right on until he had finished his second show at night it was his mission to leave behind him a long trail of smiles and laughter. Consequently, he merely sat up in bed, blinked and called out:

"I am deeply indebted to your Lambship."

"Nibby's got hiccups," replied that lady, who was not unused to this term of address. Nibby was Mrs. Lamb's grandson. His real name was Percy Alexander. The granddaughter's name was Violetta Gladys, and she was known as Tibby. They lived next door. These names, of course, had been invented by the Funny Man, who lived in a world of make-believe, where no one at all was known by their real name. He himself was known in the theatrical profession as "Willy Nilly."

"I am distressed to hear that," exclaimed Willy Nilly. "Hiccoughs at nine o'clock in the morning!

You don't say so! I always looked upon it as a nocturnal disease. The result of too many hic, hæc, hock cups."

"You must have your fun, Mr. Basingstoke, but the pore little feller has been very bad ever since he woke up."

Willy Nilly leapt out of bed and rolled across to the chest of drawers. He there produced a bottle containing little white capsules, two of which he handed to Mrs. Lamb.

"Crunch these up and swallow with a little milk, then lie on his back and think of emerald green parrots flying above a dark forest, where monkeys are hanging by their tails. In our profession the distress of hiccoughs is quite prevalent and we always cure it in this way. A man who can't conquer hiccoughs can never expect to top the bill. Now tell Master Nibby that, dear lady."

Mrs. Lamb looked at the white capsules interestingly.

"Do you really mean that, Mr. Basingstoke?"

The little fat man struck a dramatic situation.

"Did you ever find me not a man of my word, Lady Lamb?"

"You are a ONE," replied the housekeeper, and retired, holding the capsules carefully balanced in the centre of her right palm, as though they contained some secret charm which she was fearful of dispelling by her contact.

The little fat man thrust out his arms in the similitude of some long-forgotten clumsy exercise. Then he regarded himself in the mirror.

“Not too thumbs up, old boy, not too thumbs up. It’s going, you know. All the Apollo beauty—Oh, you little depraved ruffian, go and hold your head under the tap.”

No, no, it was not the business of Willy Nilly to be depressed by these reflections either in the mirror or upon the mind. He seized the strop suspended from a hook on the architrave of the window and began to flash his razor backward and forward whilst he sang:

“Oh, what care I for a new feather bed,  
And a sheet turned down so bravely—O.”

The raggle-taggle gypsies accompanied him intermittently throughout the whole operation of shaving, including the slight cut just beneath the lobe of his left ear. The business of washing and dressing was no perfunctory performance with the Funny Man. He had a personality to sustain. Moreover, among the programme of activities for the day included attendance at a wedding. There is nothing at which a funny man can be so really funny as at a wedding. One funny man at least is almost essential for the success of this time-honoured ritual. And this was a very, very special wedding; the wedding of his two dearest and greatest friends, Katie Easebrook, the pretty comedienne, and Charlie Derrick, that most

brilliant writer of ballads. A swell affair it was to be in Clapham Parish Church, with afterward a reception at the Hautboy Hotel—everything to be done “in the best slap-up style, old boy.”

No wonder Willy Nilly took an unconscionable time folding his voluminous black stock, adorned with the heavy gold pin, removing the bold check trousers from withunder the mattress, tugging at the crisp white waistcoat till it adapted itself indulgently to the curves of his figure, and hesitating for fully five minutes between the claims of seven different kinds of kid gloves. A man who tops the bill at even a suburban music hall cannot afford to neglect these things. It was fully three quarters of an hour before he presented himself in the dining-room below. Mrs. Lamb appeared automatically with the teapot and his one boiled egg.

“You’d hardly believe it,” she said, “but Nibby took them white pills and his hiccups is abated.”

“Ah! What did you expect, my good woman? Was Willy Nilly likely to deceive an innocent child? Did he think of emerald green parrots and a dark forest?”

“I told him what you said, Mr. Basingstoke. Here’s the letters and the newspaper.”

The Funny Man’s correspondence was always rather extensive, consisting for the most part of letters from unknown people commencing: “Dear Sir,—I wrote the enclosed words for a comic song last Sunday afternoon. I should think set to music

you would make them very funny——” or “Dear Sir,—I had a good idea for a funny stunt for you. Why not sing a song dressed up as a curate called: ‘The higher I aspire I espy her,’ and every time you come to the word higher, you trip up over a piece of orange peel. I leave it to you about payment for this idea, but I may say I am in straitened circumstances, and my wife is expecting another next March.”

There was a certain surprising orderliness about the Funny Man's methods. Receipts were filed, accounts kept together and paid fairly regularly, suggestions and ideas were carefully considered, begging letters placed together, with a sigh, “in case anything could be done a little later on, old boy.” Occasionally would come a chatty letter from some old friend “on the road,” or from his married sister in Yorkshire. But for the most part his correspondence was not of an intimate nature.

His newspaper this morning remained unopened. The contemplation of his own programme for the day was too absorbing to fritter away nervous energy on public affairs. Whilst cracking the egg, he visualized his time-table. At ten o'clock, Chris Read was coming to try over new songs and stunts. At eleven-fifteen, he had an appointment with Albus, the costumier in Long Acre, to set the stamp of his approval upon the wig and nose for his new song: “I'm one of the Goo-goo boys.” Kate and Charlie's was at twelve-thirty and the wedding breakfast at

“the Hautboy” at one-forty-five. In the meantime, he must write two letters and manage to call on old Mrs. Labbory, his former landlady, who was very, very ill. Poor old soul! She’d been a brick to him in the old days, when he was sometimes “out” for seven months in the year, out and penniless. It was only fair now that he should help her a bit with the rent, and see that she had everything she needed.

Willy Nilly’s life had been passed through an avenue of landladies, but the position of Mrs. Labbory was unique. He had been with her fifteen years and she was intimate with all his intimates.

At three-forty-five was a rehearsal with the Railham Empire orchestra. He must get that gag right where he bluffs the trombone player in his song: “Oh, my in-laws, my in-laws, why don’t you leave me be.” Perhaps a cup of tea somewhere, and then an appointment at five-fifteen with Welsh, to arrange terms about the renewal of contract. Knotty and difficult problems—contracts. Everyone trying to do you down—must have a clear head at five-fifteen. If there’s time, perhaps pop into the club for half an hour, exchange stories with Jimmy Landish, or old Blakeney. A chop at six-thirty—giving him an hour before making-up for the first house. On at eight-twenty. Three songs and an encore—mustn’t forget to speak to Hignet about that spotlight, the operator must have been drunk last night. Between shows interview a local pressman, and a young man who “wants to go on the stage, but has had no



experience.” Dash round for a sandwich and a refresher. On again at ten-twenty-five. Same three songs, same encore, same bluff on the trombone player. Ten-fifty, all clear. Clean up and escape from the theatre if possible.

A last nightcap at the club, perhaps? Oh, but Bird Craft wanted him to toddle along to his rooms and hear a new song he had just acquired, “a real winner,” Bird had said it was, about “The girl and the empty pram.” Must stand by an old pal. Sometime during the day he must send two suits to be cleaned, and order some new underlinen. A beastly boring business, ordering vests and pants. He knew nothing about the qualities of materials—hosiers surely did him over that. Really a woman’s business, women knew about these things. Mrs. Lamb! No, not exactly Mrs. Lamb. He couldn’t ask Mrs. Lamb to go and buy him vests and pants. A woman’s business, a woman——

Heigho! Nearly ten o’clock already. Chris Read might arrive any minute. The Funny Man dashed downstairs and ran into the house next door. Tibby had already gone off to school, but Nibby had escaped, because at the moment of departure his attack of hiccoughs had reached its apotheosis. Now he was in trouble because it had left off, and his mother now declared he had been pretending. It took the Funny Man fifteen minutes to calm this family trouble. Nibby, putting it on! Nibby, playing the wag! Oh, come! Fie and for shame!

Besides did Nibby's mother think that he, Dr. Willy Nilly, the eminent specialist of Harley Street, was a quack? Were his remedies spurious remedies?

"Did you think of emerald green parrots in a dark wood, Nibby?"

"Yes."

"And monkeys hanging by their tails?"

"Yes."

"There, you see, Mrs. Munro! It was a genuine case, and a genuine cure."

"If he really had it, Mr. Basingstoke, I don't believe it was thinking about monkeys what cured him; it was them little white tabloids, and we thank you kindly."

"Mrs. Munro, here are two tickets for the Railham Empire for the first house to-morrow night. Come, and bring your husband, and then you will see that there are more people cured by thinking of monkeys hanging by their tails than there are by swallowing tabloids. That is my business. I am a monkey hanging by its tail, and now I must be off. Good-bye, Nibby old boy. Why, if this isn't a sixpence under the mat. Well, well, this is an age of miracles. No, you keep it, old boy. Good-bye, Mrs. Munro. Come round and see me after the show to-morrow. Toot-a-loo, my dear."

Chris was waiting on the doorstep, a fresh-complexioned young man inclined to corpulence. His face glowed with a kind of vacant geniality.

"Well, old boy, how goes it?"

"I've got a peach this morning, Willy old boy; I think you'll like it."

"Good boy, come on in."

The Funny Man's drawing-room was comfortably furnished with imitation Carolian furniture, a draped ottoman, and an upright Collard piano. The walls were covered with enlarged photographs of actors and actresses in gold and walnut frames, the majority of them were autographed and contained such inscriptions as: "To my dear old Willy, from yours devotedly, Cora." "To Uncle Nilly, one of the best, Jimmy Cotswold (The Blue Girl Company, Aug. 1899)," "To Willy Nilly, 'my heart's afire,' Queenie," and so on.

"Now, let's see what you've got, old boy."

Chris sat at the piano, and unwrapped a manuscript score.

"I think this ought to win out, old boy," he said. "It's by Bert Shore. It's called 'The Desert Island.' You see the point is this. You're a bit squiffy, old boy. You see, red nose and battered top hat and your trousers turned up to the knees. You know how when it's been raining on a tarred road it looks like water. Well, we have a set like that. It's really a street island—in Piccadilly, or somewhere. You're on it, and seeing all this shining water, you think you're on a desert island and the lamppost's a palm tree. You take off your shoes and stockings and there's some good business touching the wet road with your bare toes. See, old boy? There's a

thunderin' good tune. Listen to this—tum-te-too-te tum-te-tum, rum-te-too-te-tum-te-works up, you see to a kind of nautical air—then gets back to the plaintive desert stuff—rum-tum-tum-rum-te-tum. Then here's the chorus. Listen to this, old boy:

“Lost in the jungle,  
Oh, what a bungle,  
Eaten by spiders and ants.  
Where is my happy home?  
Why did they let me roam?  
Where are my Sunday pants?”

“Good, eh? What do you think? Make something of it, old boy? Eh?”

The little man's eyes glowed with excitement. Oh, yes, this might assuredly be a winner. It was the kind of song that had made his reputation. The tune of the chorus was distinctly catchy, and his mind was already conceiving various business.

“Let's have a go at it, old boy,” he said.

He leant over the other's shoulder and began to sing. He threw back his head and thrust out his fat little stomach, his eyes rolled, and perspiration streamed down his face. He was really enjoying himself. He had just got to

Lost in a jungle,  
Oh, what a bungle,  
Eaten by spiders and ants,

when there was a knock on the door, and Mrs. Lamb thrust her head in and said: “A telegram for you, Mr. Basingstoke.”

“Eh? Oh! Well—er, never mind. Yes, thank you, my dear, give it to me.”

He opened the telegram absently, his mind still occupied with the song. When he had read it, he exclaimed:

“Good God! Poor old Joe! Yes, no, there’s no answer, my dear. I must go out.”

Mrs. Lamb retired.

“Poor old Joe! Stranded, eh?”

“What is it, old boy?” said Chris.

“Telegram from Joe Bloom. He says: ‘Can you wire me tenner, very urgent, stranded at Dundee?’ Poor old Joe! He has no luck. He was out with ‘The Queen of the Sea’ company. They must have failed. Excuse me Chris, old boy.”

The Funny Man hurried out of the room and ran downstairs. He snatched up his hat and went out. When he got round the corner, he ran. He ran as fast as he could to the High Street till he came to the London, City and Midland Bank. He filled up a cheque for fifteen pounds and cashed it. Then he ran out of the bank and trotted puffily across the road to the post office.

“I want to telegraph fifteen pounds, old girl,” he said to the fair-haired lady behind the wires. Filling up the forms took an unconscionable time, and there all the while was poor old Joe stranded in Dundee, perhaps without food! Dundee! Dundee of all places, a bleak unsympathetic town, hundreds of miles from civilization. Well, that would help him

out, anyway. True, he had had to do this twice before for Joe, and Joe had not, so far, paid him back, but Joe was a notoriously unlucky devil, and he, Willy Nilly, topping the bill at the Railham Empire, couldn't let a pal in.

When he got back to his own drawing-room, Chris was stretched at full length on the sofa, smoking a cigarette and drinking whiskey and soda.

"Sorry to have kept you, Chris, old boy."

"It's all right. I've just helped myself to a tot from the sideboard."

"That's right. That's right. Now let's see, it's a quarter to eleven. I'll have to wash out this trial, old boy. I shall be late for Albus. I like that song. I'd like to have another go at it. Have another tot, Chris, old boy. I'll join you, then I must be off."

But he didn't get to Albus that morning, because on leaving the house he remembered that he hadn't called on old Mrs. Labbory. He *must* just pop in for a few moments. It was only ten minutes' walk away. He purchased a fowl and a bottle of Madeira and hurried to 27, Radnor Street. He found his old landlady propped up on the pillows, looking gaunt and distant, as though she were already regarding the manifestations of social life from a long way off and would never participate in them again.

"Well, Martha, old girl, how goes it? Merry and bright, eh? Oh, you're looking fine. More colour than last week, eh? . . . eating better, old girl?"

A voice came across the years.

"I'm not so well, Jim. God bless you for coming."

"Of course I come. I come because I'm a selfish old rascal. I come because I want to, I know where I'm appreciated, eh? Ha, ha, ha, now don't you think you're getting worse. You're getting on fine. We'll soon have you about again, turning out cupboards, hanging wallpapers. Jemimy! Do you remember hanging that convolvulus wallpaper in my bedroom in the Gosport Road, eh?" The Funny Man slapped his leg, and the tears rolled down his cheeks with laughter at the recollection of the episode.

"Do you remember how I helped you? And all I did was to step into a pail of size, nearly broke my leg, and spoilt the only pair of trousers I had! Ha, ha, ha! He, he, he! I had to go to bed for four hours while you washed them out and aired 'em. O dear!"

Old Mrs. Labbory began to laugh, too, in a feeble, distant manner. Then she stopped and looked at him wistfully.

"You going to Katie Easebrook's wedding, Jim?"

"Eh? Oh, yes, I'm going, old girl. I'm going straight on now."

He hadn't meant to mention this. There's something a little crude in talking about a wedding to a dying woman. He paused and looked uncomfortably at his feet. The voice from the past reached him again.

“You ought to have married Katie Easebrook.”

“Eh? What’s that? Me? Oh, no, old girl, what are you talking about? Me marry Katie Easebrook? Why, I wouldn’t have had the face to ask her. Not when there’s a good fellow like Charlie about.”

Like some discerning oracle came the reply:

“Charlie’s a good feller, a good-looking feller, too—but you would have made her a better husband, Jim.”

With some curious twist of chivalry and affection the little man gripped the old woman’s hand and kissed it.

“You’ve always thought too much of me, Martha, old girl.”

“I’ve had good cause to, Jim. . . . Good-bye.”

He walked a little unsteadily down Radnor Street. A pale October sun filtered through a light mist, and gave to the meagre front gardens a certain glamour. Fat spiders hung in glistening webs between the shrubs and Japanese anemones. Children were playing absorbing games with chalk and stones upon the pavement. Cats looked down sleepily from the security of narrow walls. He had to pat a little girl’s head and arbitrate in a dispute between two girls and a boy regarding the laws of a game called “Snowball.”

“Life is a lovely thing,” he thought as he hurried on. “Poor old Martha! . . . She’s going out.”

He was, of course, late for the service in the church.



In some way he did not regret this. He slipped quietly into a seat at the back, unobserved. A hymn was being sung, or was it a psalm? He didn't know. There was something about a church service he didn't like. It disturbed him at some uncomfortable level. Charlie was standing by the altar, looking self-conscious and impatient. Katie was a ghostly unrecognizable figure, like a fly bound up in a spool in a spider's web. Thirty or forty people were scattered on either side of the central aisle. He could only see their backs. The parson began to drone the service, slowly enunciating the prescribed purposes of the married state. Willy Nilly felt a flush of discomfort. It somehow didn't seem right that Katie should have to stand there before all these people and have things put to her quite so straight.

"Rather detailed, old boy," he thought. "Perhaps that's why a bride wears a veil."

When it was over, he walked boldly up the aisle and followed a few intimates into the vestry. He was conscious of people indicating him with nudges and whispering: "Look! That's Willy Nilly!"

In the vestry, Katie's mother was weeping, and Katie appeared to be weeping with one eye and laughing with the other. A few relatives were shaking hands, kissing and talking excitedly. Someone said: "Here's Willy Nilly."

Charlie gripped his hand and whispered:

"Come on Willie, old boy, kiss the bride."

The bride looked up at him with her glorious eyes, and held out her arms.

“Dear old Willie . . . so glad you came, old boy.”

He kissed the bride all right, and held her from him.

“God bless you, dear old girl. God bless you. May you . . . may all your dreams come true, old girl.”

In most weddings there is a streak of pathos, but in theatrical weddings the note is predominant. It is as though the lookers on realize that these people whose life is passed in make-believe are bound to burn their fingers when they begin to touch reality. Perhaps their reactions are too violent to be bound within the four walls of a contract.

Katie's wedding certainly contained a large element of sadness.

“She looks so sweet and fragile. I hope he'll be good to her,” women whispered.

The lunch at the Hautboy Hotel was hilarious to an almost artificial degree. A great deal of champagne was drunk, and toasts were prolific. It was here that Willy Nilly came in. The Funny Man excelled himself. He was among the people who knew him and loved him. He made goo-goo eyes at the bridesmaids, he told stories, he imitated all the denisons of a farmyard, he gave a mock conjuring display, and his speech in proposing the health of the bride's father and mother was the hit of the afternoon. (He was not allowed the principal toast as

that had been allocated to Charlie's father, who was a stockbroker.) To the waiter who hovered behind chairs with napkined magnums of champagne, he kept on saying:

"Not too much, old boy. I've a rehearsal at three-forty."

Nevertheless, he drained his glass every time it was filled. The craving to be funny exceeded every other craving. Willy Nilly had knocked about the world in every kind of company. It took a lot to go to his head. It was almost impossible to make him drunk. When at three o'clock it was time for the bride and bridegroom to depart he was not by any means drunk, certainly not so drunk as Charlie, but he was in a slightly detached comatose state of mind. He kissed the bride once more, and to Charlie he said:

"God bless you, old boy. Be good to her. You've got the dearest woman in the world."

And Charlie replied:

"I know, old boy. You've been a brick to us. You oughtn't to have sent the cheque as well as all that silver. Good luck, old boy."

"O my in-laws, my in-laws, why don't you leave me be." It seemed but a flash from one experience to another, from pressing the girl's dainty shoulders in a parting embrace to stamping about on the draughty stage and calling into the void:

"Now, Mr. Prescott, I want a little more slowing down of this passage. Do you see what I mean, old boy? It gives me more time for the business."

The gag with the trombone player was considerably improved. Must keep going, doing things—a contract to sign at five-fifteen. He was feeling tired when the rehearsal was over—mustn't get tired before the two shows to-night. Perhaps he could get half an hour's nap after seeing the agent before it was time to feed. Someone gave him a cup of tea in the theatre, and a dresser told him a long story about a disease which his wife's father got through sitting on a churchyard wall, waiting for the village pub. to open at six.

There appeared no interval of time between this and sitting in front of the suave furtive-looking gentleman named Welsh who "handled" him on behalf of the United Varieties Agency. He was conscious of not being at his best with Welsh. He believed that he could have got much better terms in his new contract, but somehow the matter did not appear to him to be of great importance. He changed the subject and told Welsh the story about the sea captain and the Irish stewardess. Welsh laughed immoderately. After all, quite a good fellow—Welsh. He was anxious to get away and see some boys at the club. Jimmy would certainly have a new story ready. He hadn't seen Jimmy for four days.

Jimmy was certainly there, and not only Jimmy, but old Barrow, and Sam Lenning, and a host of others. He had a double Scotch whisky and proceeded to take a hand in the game of swopping im-

proper stories. At one time something seemed to jog at his consciousness and say: "Do you really think much of this kind of thing, old boy?" And another voice replied: "What does it matter? . . . They've just arrived at Brighton railway station. In another ten minutes they'll be at 'The Ship.'"

"I thought you were going to have a chop at six-thirty, Willy," someone remarked to him suddenly.

"So I am, old boy."

"It's seven-fifteen now."

Good gracious! So it was! Well, he didn't particularly want a chop. He would have a couple of sandwiches and another double Scotch. He was quite himself again in his dressing room at the theatre. He loved the smell of grease paint and spirit gum, the contact of fantastic whiskers and clothes, the rather shabby mirror under a strong light. His first song was going to be "Old Fags," the feckless ruffian who picks up cigarette ends. The dresser, whose name was Flood and who always called him Mr. Nilly, was ready with his three changes.

"Number five's on," came the message down the corridors. Good! There was only "Charlemayne," the equilibrist, between him and "his people."

Willy Nilly had got to love "his people" as he mentally designated them. He knew them, and they knew him—the reward of many years' hard work. He loved stumbling down the corridors, through the iron doors, and groping his way amidst the dim medley of the wings, where gorgeous unreal women, and

men in bowler hats patted him as he passed and whispered:

“Hullo, Willy, old boy! Good luck!”

He loved to wait there and hear his number go up; the roar of welcome which greeted it was music to his soul.

“Number seven!”

The orchestra played the opening bars and then with a queer shuffle he was before them, a preposterous figure with a bright red nose, a miniature bowler hat, and a fearful old suit with ferns growing out of the seams, and a heavy sack slung across his back.

“Old Fags! Old Fags!  
See my collection of fine old fags.  
If you want to be happy,  
If you want to be gay,  
Empty your sack  
At the fag-end of the day.”

Oh, yes, you ought to see Willy Nilly in “Old Fags.” The habitués at the Railham Empire will tell you all about him. The doleful wheezy voice, the quaint antics, and then the screamingly funny business when he empties the sack of cigarette ends all over the stage and, of course, at the bottom is a bottle of gin and a complete set of ladies’ undies (apparently new and trimmed in pink). Then the business of finding innumerable cigarette ends in his unmanageable beard.

On that night, Willy Nilly was at his best. A lightning change and he came on as “The Carpet

Salesman" in which he brought on a roll of carpet, the opportunities concerning which are obvious. Then followed "The lady who works for the lady next door." The inevitable encore—prepared for and expected—followed. A terrible Russian—more whiskers, red this time—singing:

“O Mary-vitch,  
O Ada-vitch  
I don't know which  
Ich lieber ditch;  
I told your pa  
I'd got the itch;  
He promptly hit me  
On the snitch.”

It was difficult for Willy to escape after this valiant satirical digression.

He fled perspiring to his dressing-room.

“Give me a drink, old boy,” he gasped to the lugubrious Flood.

He had smothered his face in cocoa-butter, when there was a knock on the door.

“Mr. Peter Wilberforce, representing the *Railham Mercury*.”

“Ah, yes, come in, old boy.”

Mr. Wilberforce was in no hurry to depart. He had a spot—“just a couple of fingers, old boy” of whisky. He wanted a column of bright stuff for the next issue of the weekly. “Is Railham behind the other suburbs in humour? Interview with the famous Willy Nilly—our local product.”

"You just give me a lead," said Mr. Wilberforce, "I'll fill in the padding."

Willy Nilly found turning out the bright stuff immediately after his performance the most exhausting experience of the day. He was quite relieved when, at the end of forty minutes, there was a knock at the door, and a woman with a lanky son was shown in. This was the young man who wanted to go on the stage. The pressman departed and the mother started forth on a long harangue about what people said about her son's remarkable genius for acting. Before Willy Nilly knew where he was, he was listening to the boy giving imitations of Beerbohm Tree and Henry Ainley. It was quite easy to tell which was meant to be which, and so Willy grasped the young man's hand and said:

"Very good, old boy! Very good."

He promised to do what he could, but by the time the mother had gone all over the same ground three times he found it was too late to pop round to the club again. It was nearly time to make up for the second show. He dozed in the chair for a few moments. Suddenly he thought:

"They've had dinner. They're probably taking a stroll on the front before turning in."

He poured himself out another tot of whisky and picked up his red nose.

"O God! How tired I feel! . . . Not quite the man you were, old boy."

He found it a terrible effort to go on that second



time. "Old Fags" seemed flat. He began to be subtly aware that the audience knew that he knew that the song wasn't really funny at all. At the end the applause was mild. "The Carpet Salesman" went even worse.

"Pull yourself together, old boy," he muttered as he staggered off. It wouldn't do. A man who tops the bill can't afford not to bring the house down with every song. He made a superhuman effort with "The lady who works for the lady next door." It certainly went better than the others, just well enough to take an encore rather quickly. On this occasion he altered his encore. Instead of "Maryvitch," he sang a hilarious song with the refrain:

"O my! Hold me down!  
My wife's gone away till Monday!"

At the end of the first verse he felt that he had got them. Success excited him. He went for it for all he was worth. Willy Nilly was himself again. The house roared at him. He had the greatest difficulty in escaping without giving a further encore. As he stumbled up the stone staircase to his dressing-room, he suddenly thought:

"They've gone to bed now."

The imperturbable Flood followed him, laden with properties.

"I'll just have one more spot, Flood, old boy."

How tired he was! He cleaned up languidly and got into his normal clothes.

“Well, that’s that, old boy,” he said to Flood. “Now I think we’ll toddle off to our bye-byes.”

“Excuse me, Mr. Nilly, wasn’t you going round to Mr. Bird Crafts?”

Eh? Oh, yes, for sure; he’d forgotten about poor old Bird. Couldn’t exactly let an old pal in. Well, he would have a cab and hang the expense—just stay a few minutes—dear old Bird would understand. But he stayed an hour at Bird Crafts. He listened to three new comic songs and a lot of patter.

“Yes, you’ve got a winner there, old boy,” he remarked at the end of each song.

It was nearly one o’clock when he groped his way up the dim staircase of his own house. The bedroom looked bleak and uninteresting. It had never struck him before in quite that way. He had always liked his bedroom with its heavy mahogany furniture and red plush curtains, but somehow to-night the place seemed forlorn . . . as though something was terribly lacking.

“You’re tired, old boy.”

He undressed and threw his clothes carelessly on chairs and tables. He got into bed and regarded the room, trying with his tired brain, to think what was wrong. His clothes ought not to have been thrown about like that, of course. He felt that they and he were out of place in the large room. A strange feeling of melancholy crept over him.

“It’s badly ordered . . . it’s all badly ordered, old boy.”

He had a great desire to cry, so weak he felt. But no, a man mustn't do that; a funny man certainly mustn't. His mind wandered back to his old mother. He remembered the days when she had taught him to pray. He would give anything for the relief of prayer. But he couldn't do that either. It didn't seem exactly playing the game. He had put all that kind of thing by so long ago. He despised those people who lead unvirtuous lives and then in the end turned religious. He wasn't going to pretend. He turned out the light, and closed his eyes. He would neither weep nor pray, but he must express himself somehow. Perhaps he compromised between these two human frailties. Certainly his voice was very near a sob, and his accents vividly alive with prayer as he cried to the darkness:

“Charlie, old boy, be good to her. . . . For God's sake be good to her.”

## THE BEAUTIFUL, MERCILESS LADY

**T**HERE are few men strong enough to withstand success. She is the beautiful, merciless lady.

At the first tap on the shoulder the victim of her favour rocks and staggers. She glances into his eyes, and unless he is a creature of superb control he loses his head. He plunges hither and thither, clutching at the golden aura in which she seems to float. He feels himself a thing apart, transcendent, impervious, invincible. The world of pigmy men around him are merely the drab background to a brilliant picture. He can do no wrong. The standards of morality and behaviour which these others have set up are not his standards. He is the darling of the gods, and he follows his mistress up and up, leaping from crag to crag on the slope of the sunlit mountain.

Whither?

He never puts this query to himself. He lives in a welter of exultation. All things are charged with the magic of a thousand revelations. The younger he is when she first meets him the more devastating are her allurements. Possibly this is why so many infant prodigies never emerge from the infant stage. She stifles them with a surfeit of her riches—the little

bores! She likes men best in their early manhood, when she may flirt with them at her leisure. The old she seldom troubles about. They know her wiles and are frequently too cunning or too weary.

Oh, but the young man, still with beauty and health and clean, strong limbs!

It was such a one that she met in the person of my friend, Johnny Lydgate. She led him away and destroyed him as completely as the rose is destroyed by the breath of autumn winds.

There was no reason why he should have been destroyed, no exterior cause. He had a thousand friends and no enemy, except the one which she created in himself. Everything tended to produce in Johnny Lydgate a creature of gentle bearing, of sanity, and equipoise. His father was a delightful old gentleman, a librarian in a country town, who kept homing pigeons and compiled anthologies. His mother and sisters were charming and lovable women. They formed a united, devoted family.

It was at Stoneleigh College that I first met Lydgate. We were inseparable companions for nearly four years. My recollections of him there were those of a pleasant, companionable, almost negative school-boy. He excelled at nothing and displayed no ambitions. He was affectionate, intelligent, and amusing, but at work and at sport he never rose above mediocrity.

We know a man's body by the familiar regard of its movements and expressions. We know the quality

of his mind as it is revealed to us through his opinions and observations, but it is strange how we may get to know a man's soul by some instant of revelation. We may think we are entirely familiar with him. We may have known him intimately for twenty years or more, but one day we suddenly experience a scrap of recognition of something deeper. It may be a phrase that he employs, a gesture, an attitude, some queer telepathic message from his eyes; but in that instant we realize that we know our man for the first time. All our values concerning him become readjusted from that moment.

There came such a moment to me when Lydgate and I were in our last term at Stoneleigh. I remember the moment vividly. It was after our inter-house football match, in which Lydgate had played very well—far above his average. Our Housemaster, who was a very popular man, ran up and, slapping Johnny on the back, called out: "Bravo, Lydgate! Bravo, bravo!" As he turned away I saw my school chum look up at the sky and a queer expression came over his face, a kind of drunken egoism, and I suddenly thought to myself:

"So *that* is Johnny Lydgate, after all! And I thought I knew——"

For a time after leaving school we lost touch with each other. Boys are very apt to make vows of eternal friendship, and then—well, other things happen along. Writing is such a fag.

Johnny went to Paris to study art, whilst I walked

the hospitals. However, he had not been in Paris for a year—he only wrote to me once!—when his father died. As may be imagined, a man who specializes in homing pigeons and anthologies does not leave a fortune. The Lydgate family found themselves in distressed circumstances. Lydgate was recalled from Paris, and had to do something immediately to earn money.

He took the position manfully, and with that cheery good humour that was characteristic of him. He obtained a place as an assistant to a firm of decorative designers, hoping that his meagre training might be of some assistance. His remuneration was, naturally, quite nominal, but the firm held out prospects of advancement. He stayed with this firm for seven years and gave no evidence of special ability. He jogged along stolidly, learning to make pleasant, undistinguished designs for wallpapers, cretonnes, and furniture. He was very popular in the studio where he worked, on account of his unfailing good humour, unselfishness, and gift of fun. He distinguished himself most by making caricatures of his colleagues, and imitating their voices and mannerisms. He displayed no particular ambitions, other than to jog along, and have as good a time as his limited income would allow.

We saw each other occasionally, and when I at last got my degrees I bought a practice in West Kensington, not far from where Lydgate had his rooms. He was at that time earning three hundred a year.

The house I had taken was a tall, gaunt place in an inconspicuous street. I was unmarried, and the place was obviously too large for my requirements. So I had the inspiration to suggest to Lydgate that he should occupy the upper part, and pay me whatever he was paying for his diggings. He accepted my offer with alacrity. His mother and sisters were still living in the country.

The arrangement was full of promise. We had great fun arranging, furnishing, and decorating the rooms. Lydgate spent his evenings and Sundays doing all his own painting and decorating, and he also insisted on doing mine.

I was not convinced that the delicate scheme of grays which he evolved for my consulting-room, with its frieze of stencilled peacocks and yew trees, was quite in keeping with the dignity of my bold brass plate on the front door, but then I knew nothing about art, and Lydgate was so kind in the matter that I let it pass. I had a boy to open the door, and an old woman kept the place reasonably clean, and she used to cook us an evening meal, which we had together.

That was a very happy time for both of us, and it lasted some years. My brass plate did not seem to impress the neighbourhood as I should have liked. Sometimes when I opened the door to people they used to ask for the doctor. I once attended Lydgate when he had a feverish chill, and he said my bedside manners were appalling. But gradually it got about



that young Doctor Berners was not such a fool as you might imagine. Some said that he was a fairly good, straight, sensible doctor, who took trouble with his patients. At the end of the first year the practice began to show signs of developing.

It was at this time that Lydgate had an affair with a married ballad-singer. I could never quite get to the root of the matter. Neither could I understand his infatuation. She was a fair, plump person, with magnificent neck and shoulders, a brilliantly clear but unsympathetic voice, and an almost unique gift of self-concentration. She had this wonderful voice, but she knew nothing, not even about music. She used to wear tiny paste diamonds early in the morning, and a shiny vegetable silk jumper which made her person appear even more capacious than it really was. Her name was Betty Brandt, and she had a husband who travelled in automobile accessories.

As I say, I do not know the details of this regrettable affair. I only know that it was very passionate, rather involved, and it went on for nearly six months. At the end of that time something happened. Whether they quarrelled, or whether the traveller in automobile accessories intervened, I cannot say. But Johnny Lydgate was desperately unhappy. He sulked and moped and would not go out, except backward and forward to his work. And then, one day, he did not even go to that. He told me surlily that he had left. He gave no reason. He sat about at

home, and apparently drowned his sorrow in charcoal and water-colours. He sketched and drew all day, things which he said he never got an opportunity of doing at "that confounded shop." I thought it as well to leave him alone. He paid his rent the first week and then he asked me for credit, which I naturally acceded.

One Sunday morning I went up to his room, and found the walls covered with drawings and sketches. In my poor opinion they seemed to be a brilliant advance on anything he had done before. I said so, and he seemed pleased, and announced that he was going to hawk his work around to editors, and try to start up on his own. I wished him the best of luck.

At the end of a fortnight his campaign had apparently met with a fair measure of success. He told me he had some commissions and he hoped soon to be able to let me have some money. The next morning he came into the dining-room. His face was crinkled with suppressed laughter, his eyes brilliant with exultant glee. He unfolded a drawing and held it up on the wall. It was a caricature of Betty Brandt!

It was the most brilliant and, at the same time, the cruelest thing I have ever seen. It was no portraiture, but you could not mistake it. I had never liked Betty Brandt, and I was on the point of protesting, and then the realization that this drawing, in any case, meant the end of the Betty affair, gave me such a feeling of relief that I laughed almost hysterically.

Johnny and I stood side by side, laughing till the tears rolled down our cheeks. Poor Betty!

He seemed freer after that, and worked assiduously at the orders he had in hand. I am afraid they were not very remunerative. It was a long time before he proffered any further contribution toward the upkeep of our establishment, and when he did so, it was with many groans and apologies for the smallness of the amount. I told him that he was not to worry about it; my practice was beginning to pay fairly well, and it made a great difference to me to have a companion.

For a year I observed Lydgate's grim struggle with his artistic conscience. The point was that for the work he wanted to do there was no demand. But there was work which he could do for which there was a demand. The latter gradually absorbed his energies. He refused to sponge on me. In eighteen months' time he had wiped out all debts and was beginning to make headway. He appeared to have resigned himself to a life of steady toil. I found him particularly companionable at that time. I think the Betty Brandt affair had done him good. He was calmer, quicker in his sympathies, more tolerant and reflective. He still had his moments of gay fun; his capacity for fooling was enlarged, his perceptions and discernments were more incisive.

When I was thirty and Lydgate twenty-nine we both seemed to have settled down to a solid professional life. He was making five or six hundred

a year, and had even saved a little. I was making rather more, and we had improved the conditions of our household. We now had a "general," as well as a charwoman and a page-boy. On occasions we actually entertained, bought reserved seats for the theatre, and went away for week-end jaunts.

And then, without any ostentatious forewarning, Viola appeared on the scene. She glided into our lives with the inevitableness of a portent in a Greek drama. She had occupied her place upon the stage before we had realized the significance of her entrance. She was the daughter of an old fellow-practitioner, a Doctor Brayscott, with whom I had been on friendly terms, and who had been extremely kind to me when I started my practice. His wife was dead, but he and his daughter lived two streets away, and we indulged in those little social amenities which busy professional people always seem to find time for—occasional dinners, a game of bridge, a little music. Viola sang divinely. I was, of course, the first to meet her, and I sang her praises to such good purpose that Lydgate would not rest until he met her. And then, of course, our little trouble began.

There was never a gentler, fairer, more adorable woman than Viola Brayscott. She brought into a room a feeling of complete tranquillity, warmed with the sun-kissed humours of virginal youth, seeking for ever surprises and revelations, giving out love and sympathy and drawing it to herself.

I cannot tell you of the agony and ecstasy of those

months that followed. She visited us sometimes with her father, sometimes alone. We visited her, sometimes together, sometimes alone. It took some weeks to realize that we both adored her. What was to happen? Well, I think we played the game fairly. Each knew of the other's infatuation. It was a fair field and no favour. One does learn something, after all, at an English public school. We bore each other no animosity. We took no unfair advantages.

And what of Viola? For some time the pendulum appeared to swing backward and forward. There was no gainsaying the fact that she was really fond of both of us. But the pendulum of that tenderer passion does not swing backward and forward. It has a bias, a rhythm of its own. And we each knew that the day would come when the pendulum would not swing back to one of us.

Heigho! I need hardly tell you the outcome of this contest—you will have foreseen it already. In the social arena, when Lydgate chose to shine, I was no match for him. He had all the advantages of good looks, engaging manners, and that genius for always being at his best in her presence. He shone and sparkled and glowed, whilst I sat dumb and dour and angry with myself. I could not be surprised when the pendulum swung his way and did not return to me.

They got married the following spring, and after a honeymoon in Brittany, went to live in a flat at

Barnes. We visited each other occasionally, and the complete success of their union emphasized the loneliness of my own dismal household. They were devoted to each other and bewilderingly happy.

When the possessive sense is outraged, work is our only friend and physician. I worked and worked and worked, and the practice grew. But, oh, the emptiness of those waking hours!

The following year they had a child, a boy, with those lustre-blue eyes of the father. Their happiness appeared complete. Lydgate was still doing reasonably well at what he called his "solid commercial stuff." He seemed to have put all other ambitions behind him. As a social problem I would have wagered that there would be nothing more to solve concerning him—in short, that he was going to "settle down and live happily ever afterward."

But the face of the Sphinx is inscrutable.

It all occurred so surprisingly suddenly. I believe its first inception came about through a caricature he did of Lord Balfour. Balfour is an easy person to caricature, and this was not one of Lydgate's best; but the drawing was published in a weekly and attracted the attention of a well-known Jewish gentleman, who called himself Maurice Loffley, and who dealt in other people's brains. He asked to see some of Lydgate's work, and he admired it extravagantly, especially the caricature of Betty Brandt; but he said:

“My boy, it’s celebrities we want. Famous people. Do some, and I’ll place them for you.”

The outcome was not immediately successful. Lydgate did do some, and some of them were placed; but Mr. Loffley was not very satisfactory over his business arrangements, and Lydgate ended up by doing a caricature of Mr. Loffley himself, which was the best and cruelest thing he had turned out since Betty. It was published in another illustrated weekly, and caused joy to all of Mr. Loffley’s colleagues and rivals.

The success of this rapidly led to others. Apart from his skill as a draughtsman, Lydgate had a keen wit and an adroit gift of literary exposition. He worked out some wonderful gibes at various famous people. His drawings began to be talked about, and to be in demand by editors and publishers. Their commercial value rose in direct ratio.

Barely six months after the incident of Mr. Loffley—could his name possibly have been Moritz Loeffler?—Johnny Lydgate had a one-man show at the Regent Galleries. The exhibition was a most remarkable success. A publisher bought the copyright of the entire collection right out, and nearly all the originals were sold at high prices. The Press came out with headlines about the discovery of a new satirist. Artists and society people flocked to see the exhibition.

On the Saturday afternoon following the opening I was in the galleries, talking to Johnny and his wife

and Mr. Burrows, the owner of the galleries. They were all flushed and excited, and Viola was looking proud and very pretty.

Suddenly Mr. Burrows dived across the room and returned with a tall, striking-looking girl. I did not hear Mr. Burrows introduce her, but, of course, I knew her well by sight. She was a very famous and intellectual woman, the daughter of one of His Majesty's ministers. Her photograph was always gracing the illustrated papers. I saw her shake Johnny's hand, and then I heard her deep contralto voice exclaim with feeling:

"Oh, Mr. Lydgate, I'm so pleased to make your acquaintance. I think your drawings are simply gorgeous!"

I could not hear Johnny's reply. They talked for several minutes, and she passed on. And then I saw him stagger a few steps and look up at the skylight.

My mind immediately reverted to a certain fateful moment at Stoneleigh, on that spring day after the inter-house match, when he was congratulated on his fine play, and I saw upon his face the identical expression. He was like a man dazed and drunken with the riches of his own ego. Instead of the open field and the cheering boys, he was swaying under the narcotic of a more pervading flattery—brilliant and clever people, the faint perfume of a richly dressed woman, admiring and significant glances. "That is he! That's Lydgate—Lydgate himself!"



The beautiful and merciless lady had begun to put her spell on him.

What astonished me was the rapidity with which the poison worked. Within a few months he became a celebrity. He was just thirty-three, at the very fullness of his powers. His popularity was no doubt greatly accelerated by the charm of his personality, his good looks, genial manners, and quaint humour.

He was immediately "taken up" by a certain Lady Stradling, a wealthy and adventurous American woman who adored lions. One invitation led to another. He was always out at some dinner or reception. He developed the club manner. He joined several Bohemian clubs, where he became extremely popular. He would give an entertainment at a drawing-board, making caricatures of people present and keeping up a running fire of most amusing chatter. He began to live extravagantly, but even then he was making more money than he could spend.

At first Viola entered with zest into these manifestations of social advancement. She accompanied him to many dinners and functions, but gradually they began to pall upon her, and she let him go by himself.

I remember meeting him one night the following winter at the Wombats Club. I was enormously impressed by the change in him. I was there when he arrived, and I saw him enter the room. He was still good looking, but his face had become looser,

and a little coarser. He was greeted by cries of "Hallo, Johnny! Good old Johnny!" "Who is that?" "Don't you know? That's Lydgate—Johnny Lydgate!" He tried to appear impervious to these manifestations, but at the back of his eye I could detect the slow greedy satisfaction of the man whose cup of happiness is overflowing. He spoke to me pleasantly, but his eyes wandered, seeking distinguished names and faces. He was not particularly proud at being seen in conversation with a suburban doctor.

"Who is that? Ah, excuse me, old chap; I want a word with Edwin Wray. Hallo, Wray, old boy!"

Of course, Edwin Wray is familiar to you? You may see his picture on all the hoardings—the famous comedian.

Later, Johnny did one of his inimitable sketches—a huge success, a wonderful hit at Edwin Wray. Afterward he sat at a table near me, drinking rum and water. He had developed a rather affected style of dress, with a voluminous blue and white stock, and peg top trousers. Occasionally he made a note in a sketch-book, or flung an epigram at a neighbour.

The din of the club increased. It was difficult to see across the room for smoke. And suddenly I thought of Viola. Was he neglecting her? Was he cruel to her?

It was very late when I took my departure, and I was crazy to say something to him. I did indeed

manage to mumble something to him about this kind of life being bad for one's nervous energies. He took another sip of rum and said:

"It's a lovely life, old boy—a lovely life!" I left him there.

The memory of that evening disturbed me. I felt that my position as an old friend justified me in indulging in some course of interference. A few days later I called, and found Viola alone. I thought she seemed a little abstracted and self-conscious with me. We talked of different things, and then I blurted out:

"I think Johnny is having too many late nights. He didn't look well the other evening."

She bit her lip and said nothing. Suddenly she rose, pressed my arm, and turned away. She was crying. I went up to her.

"Tell me, Viola, is anything wrong?"

She dabbed her eyes.

"No, no—oh, no; it's only that he—it's just what you say. Too many late nights, and sometimes he drinks too much, and has headaches and is sullen; there's nothing else, Tom. He loves me as much as ever, I am certain. He hasn't the strength, that's all."

Oh, the beautiful, merciless lady! She took nearly three years to destroy my friend. You may say that drink was the cause of his ultimate downfall. Drink certainly accelerated it, but it was not the basic cause. He was drunk before he began to drink—drunk with the rich wine of her charms.

Have you ever seen a man destroyed in that way? The spectacle is not edifying. He went rapidly from bad to worse. The miracle is how he retained his powers as a draughtsman almost to the end. From a pleasant good-looking young man he developed into a puffy, distinguished-looking Georgian roué. The world spoiled him, and he hadn't the strength to stand up against it. The standards of morality and behaviour which these other men set up did not apply to Johnny Lydgate. Oh, dear, no! He was above it all, a thing apart, a genius, the observed of all observers. Sometimes he would be out all night. Sometimes he would be lost for days together. Then he would turn up, be very ill, and go to bed. Viola would minister to him, and give him hot-water bottles. And he would cry and become maudlin. He would swear not to do it again. He loved her—oh, how he loved her!

And she would stroke his temple and whisper:

“Strength, dear, strength. You must try. Oh, you must try, for my sake!”

Of course he would try. How ill he felt! And the days passed, and his physical strength returned to him. Came also the little whispers of the outside world. An invitation to Lady Stradling's; telephone messages from anxious publishers; the sale of two water-colours at a record price; the house dinner at the Wombats Club. Just this once—oh, just this once, Viola!

Back he went, lost to the claims of common

decency. His face became lined and blotchy. He trembled in his movements; the veins in his arms and his hands stood out like knotted cords.

To the very end she tended him, shielded him, mothered him, and fought for him. The world will never know what that woman suffered and endured. She says that he was never cruel to her, except by his neglect and lack of consideration. In his behaviour toward her he was always tender and passionate, contrite, disgusted with himself. He knew quite well what he was doing. It was not that he loved Viola any the less, but that he was clay in the hands of that more powerful mistress—the glamour of publicity, to be talked about, to be pointed at, to be praised in the Press.

Doctor Brayscott and I did what we could. We advised and argued and cajoled, and even bullied. He had other real friends, too. Everybody did what he could, but it was of no avail. When he sank into that last illness from which he never recovered, I visited him one day, and sat regarding the spectacle of “that unmatched form and feature of blown youth, blasted with ecstasy.” He opened his eyes and looked at me. He gave me a quick glance of apprehension. Suddenly he smiled in his old way and whispered:

“It was worth while, old boy!”

Some men are made that way. They must crowd their life into a capsule and swallow it. They know they are wooing destruction, and it is “worth while.”

Not for them the steady rhythm of an ordered life. The beautiful, merciless lady pipes the tune and they must dance.

\*           \*           \*           \*           \*

In spite of all, Johnny Lydgate remains a precious and endearing memory to us—to Viola and me. When I married her, two years after his death, we went abroad for a while, and on our return I acquired a practice at Knayling, on the Sussex downs, and there we built our home. The boy is a perfect joy to us. He has his father's eyes and vivacious manners, and something of his mother's warmth and tenderness. The study of his welfare and training is a constant source of affectionate discussion. What will he become? What lies before him? We are full of hope and tremulous surmises. Only at times do the old doubts and fears assail us. He is twenty now, and next term he leaves Cambridge. On this desk, as I write, there is a letter from him, written to his mother:

MOTHER DEAR,—

What is all this about the Indian Civil Service? I should simply hate it. Fancy seeing all one's life in perspective! Knowing exactly how much you will be earning when you're forty-five; knowing that you'll get a pension when you're sixty or seventy, or whenever it is. Who cares what happens when they are seventy! No, old thing. Tony Stephens is going to Paris to study art. I think I should like to join him. You know I can draw, don't you? Smithers thinks my life studies are pretty

useful. I have a feeling that I might do well. Anyway, we'll talk it over when I come down. Crowds of love, mother dear.—

Your loving  
SON.

And I sit here, turning it over and biting my pen. He has his father's lustre-blue eyes. How would you answer this letter? Can one advise the young?

## THE ACCIDENT OF CRIME

EVERY seaman who makes the city of Bordeaux a port of call knows the Rue Lucien Faure. It is one of those irregular streets which one finds in the neighbourhood of docks in every city in the world. Cord wainers, ships' stores, cafés and strange foreign eating houses jostle each other indiscriminately. At the farther end of the Rue Lucien Faure, and facing Bassin à Flot No. 2, is a little cul de sac known as Place Duquesne, an obscure honeycomb of high dingy houses. It had often been pointed out to the authorities that the Place Duquesne was a scandal to the neighbourhood; not that the houses themselves were either better or worse than those of adjoining streets, but that the inhabitants belonged almost entirely to the criminal classes. A murderer, an apache, a blackmailer, a coiner, hardly ever appeared in the Court of Justice without his habitation being traced to this unsavoury retreat.

And the authorities did nothing. Indeed, Chief Inspector Tolozan, who had that neighbourhood under his special supervision, said that he preferred it as it was. He affirmed—not unreasonably—that it was better to have all one's birds in one nest rather



than have them scattered all over the wood. Tolozan, although a practical man, was something of a visionary. He was of that speculative turn of mind which revels in theories. The contemplation of crime moved him in somewhat the same way that a sunset will affect a landscape painter. He indulged in broad generalities, and it always gave him a mild thrill of pleasure when the actions or behaviour of his protégées substantiated his theories.

In a detached way, he had quite an affection for his "birds," as he called them. He knew their record, their characteristics, their tendencies, their present occupation, if any, their place of abode—which was generally the Place Duquesne. If old Granouz, the forger, moved from the attic in No. 17 to the basement in No. 11, Monsieur Tolozan would sense the reason of this change. And he never interfered until the last minute. He allowed Carros to work three months on that very ingenious plant for counterfeiting one franc notes. He waited till the plates were quite complete before he stepped in with his quiet:

"Now, *mon brave*, it distresses me to interfere. . . ."

He admired the plates enormously, and in the van on the way to the police court he sighed many times, and ruminated upon what he called "the accident of crime." One of his pet theories was that no man was entirely criminal. Somewhere at some time it had all been just touch and go. With better fortune the

facile Carros might now be the director of an insurance company, or perhaps an eminent pianist. Another saying of his, which he was very fond of repeating, was this:

“The law does not sit in judgment on people. Laws are only made for the protection of the citizen.”

His colleagues were inclined to laugh at “Papa Tolozan,” as they called him, but they were bound to respect his thoroughness and conscientiousness, and they treated his passion for philosophic speculation as merely the harmless eccentricity of an urbane and charming character. Perhaps in this attitude toward crime there have always been two schools of thought, the one which regards it—like Tolozan—as “the accident,” the other, as represented by the forceful Muguet of the Council of Jurisprudence at Bayonne, who insists that crime is an ineradicable trait, an inheritance, a fate. In spite of their divergence of outlook these two were great friends, and many and long were the arguments they enjoyed over a glass of vermouth and seltzer at a quiet café they sometimes favoured in the Cours du Pavé, when business brought them together. Muguet would invariably clinch the argument with a staccato:

“Well, come now, what about old Laissac?”

Then he would slap his leg and laugh. Here, indeed, was a hard case. Here, indeed, was an irreconcilable, an *intransigent*, an ingrained criminal, and as this story principally concerns old Laissac it

may be as well to describe him a little in detail at once. He was at that time fifty-seven years of age. Twenty-one years and ten months of that period had been passed in penitentiaries, prisons, and convict establishments. He was already an old man, but a wiry, energetic old man, with a battered face seamed by years of vicious dissipations and passions.

At the age of seventeen he had killed a Chinaman. The affair was the outcome of a dockside *mêlée*, and many contended that Laissac was not altogether responsible. However that may be, the examining magistrate at that time was of opinion that there had been rather too much of that sort of thing of late, and that an example must be made of someone. Even the chink must be allowed some show of protection. Laissac was sent to a penitentiary for two years. He returned an avowed enemy of society. Since that day, he had been convicted of burglary, larceny, passing of counterfeit coins, assault, and drunkenness. These were only the crimes of which he had actually been convicted, but everyone knew that they were only an infinitesimal fraction of the crimes of which he was guilty.

He was a cunning old man. He had bashed one of his pals and maimed him for life, and the man was afraid to give evidence against him. He had treated at least two women with almost unspeakable cruelty. There was no record of his ever having done a single action of kindness or unselfishness. He had, moreover, been a perverter and betrayer of others. He

bred crime with malicious enjoyment. He trained young men in the tricks of the trade. He dealt in stolen property. He was a centre, a focus, of criminal activity. One evening, Muguet remarked to Tolozan, as they sipped their coffee:

“The law is too childish. That man has been working steadily all his life to destroy and pervert society. He has a diseased mind. Why aren’t we allowed to do away with him? If, as you say, the laws were made to protect citizens, there’s only one way to protect ourselves against a villain like Laissac—the guillotine.”

Tolozan shook his head slowly. “No, the law only allows capital punishment in the case of murder.”

“I know that, my old cabbage. What I say is, why should society bother to keep an old ruffian like that?”

Tolozan did not answer, and Muguet continued: “Where is he now?”

“He lives in an attic in the Place Duquesne, No. 33.”

“Are you watching him?”

“Oh, yes.”

“Been to call on him?”

“I was there yesterday.”

“What was he doing?”

“Playing with a dog.”

Muguet slapped his leg, and threw back his head. Playing with a dog! That was excellent! The

greatest criminal in Bordeaux—playing with a dog! Muguet didn't know why it was so funny. Perhaps it was just the vision of his old friend, Tolozan, solemnly sitting there and announcing the fact that Laissac was playing with a dog, as though it were a matter of profound significance. Tolozan looked slightly annoyed and added:

“He's very fond of dogs.”

This seemed to Muguet funnier still, and it was some moments before he could steady his voice to say:

“Well, I'm glad he's fond of something. Was there nothing you could lay your hands on?”

“Nothing.”

It is certainly true that Muguet had a strong case in old Laissac to confute his friend's theories. Where was “the accident of crime” in such a confirmed criminal?

It is also true old Laissac was playing with a dog, and at that very moment. Whilst the representatives of law and order were discussing him in the Café Basque he was tickling the ribs of his beloved Sancho, and saying:

“Up, soldier. Courage, my old warrior.”

Sancho was a strange, forlorn-looking beast, not entirely retriever, not wholly poodle, indeed not necessarily dog at all. He had large sentimental eyes, and he worshipped his master with unquestioning adoration. When his master was out, as he frequently was on strange nocturnal adventures, he

would lie on the mat by the door, his nostrils snuggled between his paws, and watch the door. Directly his master entered the house, Sancho would be aware of it. He would utter one long whine of pleasure, and his skin would shake and tremble with excitement. The reason of his perturbations this morning was that part of the chimney had fallen down with a crash. The brickwork had given way, and a little way up old Laissac could see a narrow opening, revealing the leads on the adjoining roof. It was summer time and such a disaster did not appal him unduly.

“Courage,” he said, “to-morrow that shall be set right. To-day and to-night we have another omelette in the pan, old comrade. To-morrow there will be ham bones for Sancho, and a nice bottle of fine champagne for the breadwinner, eh? Lie down, boy, that’s only old Grogard!”

The dog went into his corner, and a most strange-looking old man entered the room. He had thin white hair, a narrow horse-like face with prominent eyes. His face appeared much too thin and small for the rest of his body, which had unexpected projections and convolutions. From his movements it was immediately apparent that his left side was paralyzed. On the left breast of his shabby green coat was a medal for saving lives. The medal recorded that, at the age of twenty-six, he had plunged into the Garonne, and saved the lives of two boys. He sat down and produced a sheet of dirty paper.

"Everything is in order," he said dolefully.

"Good," said Laissac. "Show us the plan."

"This is the garage and the room above where you enter. The chauffeur left with Madame Delannelle and her maid for Pau this morning. They will be away three weeks or more. Monsieur Delannelle sleeps in this room on the first floor; but, as you know, he is a drug fiend. From eleven o'clock till four in the morning he is in a coma. Lisette and the other maid sleep on the top floor. Lisette will see that this other woman gets a little of the white powder in her cider before she retires. There is no one else in the house. There is no dog."

"It appears a modest enterprise."

"It is as easy as opening a bottle of white oil. The door of the room above the garage, connecting with the first landing in the house, is locked and the key taken away, but it is a very old-fashioned lock. You could open it with a bone toothpick, master."

"H'm. I suppose Lisette expects something out of this?"

The old man sniggered, and blew his nose on a red handkerchief.

"She's doing it for love."

"You mean—young Leon Briteuil?"

"Yes, now this is the point, master. Are you going to crack this crib yourself, or would you like young Briteuil to go along? He's a promising lad, and he would be proud to be in a job with you."

"What stuff is there, there?"

“In the second drawer on the left-hand side in a bureau in the salon is a cash box, where Monsieur keeps the money from his rents. He owns a lot of small property. There ought to be about ten thousand francs. Madame has taken most of her jewels, but there are a few trinkets in a jewel case in the bedroom. For the rest, there is a collection of old coins in a cabinet, some of them gold. That is in the library, here, see? And the usual silver plate and trinkets scattered about the house. Altogether a useful haul, too much for one man to carry.”

“Very well, I’ll take the young—tell him to be at the Place du Pont, the other side of the river, at twelve-thirty. If he fails or makes the slightest slip, I’ll break his face. Tell him that. That’s all.”

“Right you are, master.”

Young Briteuil was not quite the lion-hearted person he liked to pose as, and this message frightened him. Long before the fateful hour of the appointment, he was dreading the association of the infamous Laissac more than the hazardous adventure upon which he was committed. He would have rather made the attempt by himself. He was neat with his fingers and had been quite successful pilfering little articles from the big stores, but he had never yet experienced the thrill of housebreaking.

Moreover, he felt bitterly that the arrangement was unjust. It was he who had manœuvred the whole field of operations, he with his spurious love-making to the middle-aged coquettish Lisette. There



was a small fortune to be picked up, but because he was pledged to the gang of which Laissac was the chief, his award would probably amount to a capful of sous. Laissac had the handling of the loot, and he would say that it realized anything he fancied. Grognard had to have his commission also. The whole thing was grossly unfair. He deeply regretted that he had not kept the courting of Lisette a secret. Visions of unholy orgies danced before his eyes. However, there it was, and he had to make the best of it. He was politeness and humility itself when he met old Laissac at the corner of the Place du Pont punctually at the hour appointed. Laissac was in one of his sullen moods and they trudged in silence out to the northern suburb where the villa of Monsieur Delannelle was situated.

The night was reasonably dark and fine. As they got nearer and nearer to their destination, and Laissac became more and more unresponsive, the younger man's nerves began to get on edge. He was becoming distinctly jumpy, and, as people will in such a condition, he carried things to the opposite extreme. He pretended to be extremely light-hearted, and to treat the affair as a most trivial exploit. He even assumed an air of flippancy, but in this attitude he was not encouraged by his companion, who on more than one occasion told him to keep his ugly mouth shut.

"You won't be so merry when you get inside," he said.

“But there is no danger, no danger at all,” laughed the young man unconvincingly.

“There’s always danger in our job,” growled Laisac. “It’s the things you don’t expect that you’ve got to look out for. You can make every preparation, think of every eventuality, and then suddenly, presto! a bullet from some unknown quarter. The gendarmes may have had wind of it all the time. Monsieur Delannelle may not have indulged in his dope for once. He may be sitting up with a loaded gun. The girl Lisette may be an informer. The other girl may have heard and given the game away. Madame and the chauffeur may return at any moment. People have punctures sometimes. You can even get through the job and then be nabbed at the corner of the street, or the next morning, or the following week. There’s a hundred things likely to give you away. Inspector Tolozan himself may be hiding in the garden with a half-dozen of his thick-necks. Don’t you persuade yourself it’s a soft thing, my white-livered cockerel.”

This speech did not raise Leon’s spirits. When they reached the wall adjoining the garage, he was trembling like a leaf, and his teeth began to chatter.

“I could do with a nip of brandy,” he said sullenly in a changed voice.

The old criminal looked at him contemptuously, and produced a flask from some mysterious pocket. He took a swig, and then handed it to his companion.

He allowed him a little gulp, and then snatched the flask away.

“Now, up you go,” he said. Leon knew then that escape was impossible. Old Laissac held out his hands for him to rest his heel upon. He did so, and found himself jerked to the top of the wall. The old man scrambled up after him somehow. They then dropped down quietly on to some sacking in the corner of the yard. The garage and the house were in complete darkness. The night was unnaturally still, the kind of night when every little sound becomes unduly magnified. Laissac regarded the dim structure of the garage with a professional eye. Leon was listening for sounds, and imagining eyes peering at them through the shutters . . . perhaps a pistol or two already covering them. His heart was beating rapidly. He had never imagined it was going to be such a nerve-racking business. Curse the old man! Why didn't he let him have his full whack at the brandy?

A sudden temptation crept over him. The old man was peering forward. He would hit him suddenly on the back of the head and then bolt. Yes, he would. He knew he would never have the courage to force his way into that sinister place of unknown terrors. He would rather die out here in the yard.

“Come on,” said Laissac, advancing cautiously toward the door of the garage.

Leon slunk behind him, watching for his opportunity. He had no weapon, nothing but his hands,

and he knew that in a struggle with Laissac he would probably be worsted. The tidy concrete floor of the yard held out no hope of promiscuous weapons. Once he thought: "I will strike him suddenly on the back of the head with all my might. As he falls I'll strike him again. When he's on the ground I'll kick his brains out. . . ."

To such a desperate pass can fear drive a man! Laissac stood by the wood frame of the garage door looking up and judging the best way to make an entrance of the window above. While he was doing so Leon stared round, and his eye alighted on a short dark object near the wall. It was a piece of iron piping. He sidled toward it, and surreptitiously picked it up. At that exact instant Laissac glanced round at him abruptly and whispered:

"What are you doing?"

Now must this desperate venture be brought to a head. He stumbled toward Laissac, mumbling vaguely:

"I thought this might be useful."

Leon was left-handed and he gripped the iron piping in that hand. Laissac was facing him, and he must be put off his guard. He mumbled:

"What's the orders, master?"

He doubtless hoped from this that Laissac would turn round and look up again. He made no allowance for that animal instinct of self-preservation which is most strongly marked in men of low mentality. Without a word old Laissac sprang at him.

He wanted to scream with fear, but instead he struck wildly with the iron. He felt it hit something ineffectually. A blow on the face staggered him. In the agony of recovery he realized that his weapon had been wrenched from his hands! Now, indeed, he would scream, and rouse the neighbourhood to save him from this monster. If he could only get his voice! If he could only get his voice! Curse this old devil! Where is he? Spare me! Spare me! Oh, no, no . . . oh, God!

Old Laissac stuffed the body behind a bin where rubbish was put, in the corner of the yard. The struggle had been curiously silent and quick. The only sound had been the thud of the iron on his treacherous assistant's skull, a few low growls and blows. Fortunately, the young man had been too paralyzed with fear to call out. Laissac stood in the shadow of the wall and waited. Had the struggle attracted any attention? Would it be as well to abandon the enterprise? He thought it all out dispassionately. An owl, with a deep mellow note, sailed majestically away toward a neighbouring church. Perhaps it was rather foolish. If he were caught, and the body discovered—that would be the end of Papa Laissac! That would be a great misfortune. Everyone would miss him so, and he still had life and fun in him. He laughed bitterly. Yes, perhaps he had better steal quietly away. He moved over to the outer wall.

Then a strange revulsion came over him, perhaps

a deep bitterness with life, or a gambler's lure. Perhaps it was only professional vanity. He had come here to burgle this villa, and he disliked being thwarted. Besides it was such a soft thing, all the dispositions so carefully laid. He had already thought out the way to mount to the bedroom above the door. In half an hour he might be richer by many thousand francs, and he had been getting rather hard up of late. That young fool would be one less to pay. He shrugged his broad shoulders, and crept back to the garage door.

In ten minutes time he had not only entered the room above the garage but had forced the old-fashioned lock, and entered the passage connecting with the house. He was perfectly cool now, his senses keenly alert. He went down on his hands and knees and listened. He waited some time, focussing in his mind the exact disposition of the rooms as shown in the plan old Grogard had shown him. He crawled along the corridor like a large gorilla. At the second door on the left he heard the heavy, stentorian breathing of a man inside the room. Monsieur Delannelle, good! It sounded like the breathing of a man under the influence of drugs or drink.

After that, with greater confidence, he made his way downstairs to the salon. With unerring precision he located the drawer in the bureau where the cash box was kept. The box was smaller than he expected and he decided to take it away rather than

to indulge in the rather noisy business of forcing the lock. He slipped it into a sack. Guided by his electric torch, he made a rapid round of the reception rooms. He took most of the collection of old coins from the cabinet in the library and a few more silver trinkets. Young Briteuil would certainly have been useful carrying all this bulkier stuff. Rather unfortunate, but still it served the young fool right. He, Laissac, was not going to encumber himself with plate . . . a few small and easily negotiable pieces were all he desired, sufficient to keep him in old brandy, and Sancho in succulent ham bones for a few months to come. A modest and simple fellow, old Laissac.

The sack was soon sufficiently full. He paused by the table in the dining room and helped himself to another swig of brandy, then he blinked his eyes. What else was there? Oh, yes, Grognard had said that there were a few of Madame's jewels in the jewel case. But that was in the bedroom where Monsieur Delannelle was sleeping, that was a different matter, and yet after all, perhaps, a pity not to have the jewels!

H'm, Monsieur Delannelle was in one of his drug stupours. It must be about two o'clock. They said he never woke till five or six. Why not? Besides what was a drugged man? He couldn't give any trouble. If he tried to, Laissac could easily knock him over the head as he had young Briteuil—might just as well have those few extra jewels. His

senses tingled rather more acutely as he once more crept upstairs. He pressed his ear to the keyhole of Monsieur Delannelle's bedroom. The master of the house was still sleeping.

He turned the handle quietly, listened, then stole into the room, closing the door after him. Now for it. He kept the play of his electric torch turned from the bed. The sleeper was breathing in an ugly, irregular way. He swept the light along the wall, and located the dressing-table—satinwood and silver fittings. A new piece of furniture—curse it! The top right-hand drawer was locked. And that was the drawer which the woman said contained the jewel case. Dare he force the lock? Was it worth it? He had done very well. Why not clear off now? Madame had probably taken everything of worth. He hesitated and looked in the direction of the sleeper. Rich guzzling old pig! Why should he have all these comforts and luxuries whilst Laissac had to work hard and at such risk for his living? Be damned to him. He put down his sack and took a small steel tool out of his breast pocket. It was necessary to make a certain amount of noise, but after all the man in the bed wasn't much better than a corpse. Laissac went down on his knees and applied himself to his task.

The minutes passed. Confound it! It was a very obstinate lock. He was becoming quite immersed in its intricacy when something abruptly jarred his sensibilities. It was a question of silence. The



sleeper was no longer snoring or breathing violently. In fact he was making no noise at all. Laissac was aware of a queer tremor creeping down his spine for the first time that evening. He was a fool not to have cleared out after taking the cash box. He had overdone it. The man in bed was awake and watching him! What was the best thing to do? Perhaps the fool had a revolver! If there was any trouble he must fight. He couldn't allow himself to be taken, with that body down below stuffed behind the dust-bin. Why didn't the tormentor call out or challenge him? Laissac crept lower and twisted his body into a crouching position.

By this action he saved his life, for there was a sudden blinding flash, and a bullet struck the dressing-table just at the place where his head had been. This snapping of the tension was almost a relief. It was a joy to revert to the primitive instincts of self-preservation. At the foot of the bed an eider-down had fallen. Instinct drove him to snatch this up. He scrumpled it up into the rough form of a body and thrust it with his right hand over the end of the bed. Another bullet went through it and struck the dressing-table again. But as this happened, Laissac, who had crept to the left side of the bed sprang across it and gripped the sleeper's throat. The struggle was of momentary duration. The revolver dropped to the floor. The man addicted to drugs gasped, spluttered, then his frame shook violently and he crumpled into an inert mass upon

the bed. A blind fury was upon Laissac. He struck the still cold thing again and again, then a revulsion of terror came over him. He crouched in the darkness, sweating with fear.

“They’ll get me this time,” he thought. “Those shots must have been heard. Lisette, the other maid, the neighbours, the gendarmes . . . two of these disgusting bodies to account for. I’d better leave the swag and clear.” He drained the rest of the brandy and staggered uncertainly toward the door. The house was very still. He turned the handle and went into the passage. Then one of those voices which were always directing his life said:

“Courage, old man, why leave the sack behind? You’ve worked for it. Besides, one might as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb!”

He went quietly back and picked up the sack. But his hands were shaking violently. As he was returning, the sack with its metallic contents struck the end of the brass bed. This little accident affected him fantastically. He was all fingers and thumbs to-night. What was the matter? Was he losing his nerve? Getting old? Of course, the time must come when—God! What was that? He stood dead still by the jamb of the door. There was the sound of the stealthy tread on the stairs, the distinct creak of a board. How often in his life had he not imagined that! But there was no question about it to-night. He was completely unstrung.

“If there’s another fight I won’t be able to face it. I’m done.”

An interminable interval of time passed, and then—that quiet creaking of another board, the person, whoever it was, was getting nearer. He struggled desperately to hold himself together, to be prepared for one more struggle, even if it should be his last. Suddenly a whisper came down the stairs:

“Leon!”

Leon! What did they mean? Eh? Oh, yes—Leon Briteuil! Of course that fool of a woman, the informer—Lisette. She thought it was Leon. Leon, her lover. He breathed more easily. Women have their uses and purposes after all. But he must be very circumspect. There must be no screaming. She repeated:

“Leon, is that you?”

With a great effort he controlled his voice.

“It’s all right. I’m Leon’s friend. He’s outside.”

The woman gave a little gasp of astonishment.

“Oh! I did not know——”

“Very quietly, mademoiselle. Compose yourself. I must now rejoin him. Everything is going well.”

“But I would see him. I wish to see him to-night. He promised——”

Laissac hurried noiselessly down the stairs, thankful for the darkness. He waited till he had reached the landing below. Then he called up in a husky voice:

“Wait till ten minutes after I have left the house,

mademoiselle, then come down. You will find your Leon waiting for you behind the dust-bin in the yard."

And fortunately for Lisette's momentary peace of mind she could not see the inhuman grin which accompanied this remark.

From the moment of his uttering it till four hours later, when his mangled body was discovered by a gendarme on the pavement just below the window of the house in which he lived in the Place Duquesne, there is no definite record of old Laissac's movements or whereabouts.

It exists only in those realms of conjecture in which Monsieur Tolozan is so noted an explorer.

Old Laissac had a genius for passing unnoticed. He could walk through the streets of Bordeaux in broad daylight with stolen clocks under each arm and it never occurred to any one to suspect him, but when it came to travelling in the dark he was unique. At the inquest, which was held five days later, not a single witness could come forward and say that they had seen anything of him either that evening or night.

That highly eminent advocate, Maxim Colbert, president of the court, passed from the cool mortuary into the stuffy courthouse with a bored, preoccupied air. Dead bodies did not greatly interest him, and he had had too much experience of them to be nauseated by them—besides, an old criminal! It appeared to him a tedious and unnecessary waste

of time. The old gentleman had something much more interesting occupying his mind. He was expecting his daughter-in-law to present his son with a child. The affair might happen now, any moment, indeed, it might already have happened. Any moment a message might come with the good tidings. A son! Of course it must be a son! The line of Colbert tracing their genealogy back to the reign of Louis XIV—must be perpetuated. A distinguished family of advocates, generals, rulers of men. A son! It annoyed him a little in that he suspected that his own son was anxious to have a daughter. Bah! Selfishness.

Let us see what is this case all about? Oh, yes, an old criminal named Theodore Laissac, aged fifty-seven, wanted by the police in connection with a mysterious crime at the villa of Monsieur and Madame Delannelle. The body found by a printer's devil, named Adolp Roger, at 4:15 o'clock on the morning of the ninth, on the pavement of the Place Duquesne. Witness informed police. Sub-inspector Floquette attested to the finding of body as indicated by witness. The position of body directly under attic window, five stories high, occupied by deceased, suggesting that he had fallen or thrown himself therefrom. Good! Quite clear. A life of crime, result—suicide. Will it be a boy or a girl? Let us have the deceased's record. . . .

A tall square-bearded inspector stood up in the body of the court, and in a sepulchral voice read out

the criminal life record of Theodore Laissac. It was not pretty reading. It began at the age of seventeen with the murder of the Chinaman, Ching Loo, and from thence onward it revealed a deplorable story of villainy and depravity. The record of evil doings and the award of penalties became monotonous. The mind of Maxim Colbert wandered back to his son, and to his son's son. He had already seen the case in a nutshell and dismissed it. It would give him a pleasant opportunity a little later on. A homily on the wages of sin . . . a man whose life was devoted to evil-doing, in the end driven into a corner by the forces of justice, smitten by the demons of conscience, dies the coward's death. A homily on cowardice, quoting a passage from Thomas à Kempis, excellent! . . . Would they send him a telegram? Or would the news come by hand? What was that the Counsel for the Right of the Poor was saying? Chief Inspector Tolozan wished to give evidence. Ah, yes, why not? A worthy fellow, Inspector Tolozan. He had known him for many years, worked with him on many cases, an admirable, energetic officer, a little given to theorizing—an interesting fellow, though. He would cross-examine him himself.

Inspector Tolozan took his place in the witness box, and bowed to the president. His steady gray eyes regarded the court thoughtfully as he tugged at his thin gray imperial.

“Now, Inspector Tolozan, I understand that you

have this district in which this—unfortunate affair took place, under your own special supervision?”

“Yes, *monsieur le president*.”

“You have heard the evidence of the witnesses Roger and Floquette with regard to the finding of the body?”

“Yes, *monsieur*.”

“Afterward, I understand, you made an inspection of the premises occupied by the deceased?”

“Yes, *monsieur*.”

“At what time was that?”

“At six-fifteen, *monsieur*.”

“Did you arrive at any conclusions with regard to the cause or motive of the—er accident?”

“Yes, *monsieur le president*.”

“What conclusions did you come to?”

“I came to the conclusion that the deceased, Theodore Laissac, met his death trying to save the life of a dog.”

“A dog! Trying to save the life of a dog!”

“Yes, *monsieur*.”

The president looked at the court, the court looked at the president and shuffled with papers, glancing apprehensively at the witness between times. There was no doubt that old Tolozan was becoming cranky, very cranky indeed. The president cleared his throat—was he to be robbed of his homily on the wages of sin?

“Indeed, Monsieur Tolozan, you came to the conclusion that the deceased met his death trying to

save the life of a dog! Will you please explain to the court how you came to these conclusions?"

"Yes, *monsieur le president*; the deceased had a dog to which he was very devoted."

"Wait one moment, Inspector Tolozan, how do you know that he was devoted to this dog?"

"I have seen him with it. Moreover, during the years he has been under my supervision he has always had a dog to which he was devoted. I could call some of his criminal associates to prove that, although he was frequently cruel to men, women, and even children, he would never strike or be unkind to a dog. He would never burgle a house guarded by a dog in case he had to use violence."

"Proceed."

"During that day or evening there had apparently been a slight subsidence in the chimney place of the attic occupied by Laissac. Some brickwork had collapsed, leaving a narrow aperture just room enough for a dog to squeeze its body through, and get out on the sloping leads of the house next door. The widow Forbin, who occupies the adjoining attic, complains that she was kept awake for three hours that night by the whining of a dog on the leads above. This whining ceased about three-thirty, which must have been the time that the deceased met his death. There was only one way for a man to get from his attic to these leads and that was a rain-water pipe, sloping from below the window at an angle of forty-five degrees to the roof next door. He could stand on



this water pipe, but there was nothing to cling to except small projections of brick till he could scramble hold of the gutter above. He never reached the gutter."

"All of this is pure conjecture, of course, Inspector Tolozan?"

"Not entirely, *monsieur le president*. My theory is that after Laissac's departure, the dog became disconsolate and restless, as they often will, knowing by some mysterious instinct that its master is in danger. He tried to get out of the room and eventually succeeded in forcing his way through the narrow aperture in the fireplace. His struggle getting through brought down some more brickwork and closed up the opening. This fact I have verified. Out on the sloping roof the dog naturally became terrified. There was no visible means of escape; the roof was sloping, and the night cold. Moreover, he seemed more cut off from his master than ever. As the widow, Forbin, asserts, he whined pitiably. Laissac returned some time after three o'clock. He reached the attic. The first thing he missed was the dog. He ran to the window and heard it whining on the roof above. Probably he hesitated for some time as to the best thing to do. The dog leaned over and saw him. He called to it to be quiet, but so agitated did it appear, hanging over the edge of that perilous slope, that Laissac thought every moment that it would jump. *Monsieur le president*, nearly every crime has been lain at the door of the deceased,

but he has never been accused of lack of physical courage. Moreover, he was accustomed to climbing about buildings. He dropped through that window and started to climb up."

"How do you know this?"

"I examined the water pipe carefully. The night was dry and there had not been rain for three days. Laissac had removed his boots. He knew that it would naturally be easier to walk along a pipe in his socks. There are the distinct marks of stockinged feet on the dusty pipes for nearly two metres of the journey. The body was bootless and the boots were found in the attic. But he was an old man for his age, and probably he had had an exhausting evening. He never quite reached the gutter."

"Are the marks on the gutter still there?"

"No, but I drew the attention of three of my subordinates to the fact, and they are prepared to support my view. It rained the next day. The body of the dog was found by the side of its master."

"Indeed! Do you suggest that the dog—committed suicide as it were?"

Tolozan shrugged his shoulders and bowed. It was not his business to understand the psychology of dogs. He was merely giving evidence in support of his theories concerning the character of criminals—"birds"—and the accident of crime.

Maxim Colbert was delighted. The whole case had been salvaged from the limbo of dull routine.

He even forgave Tolozan for causing him to jetison those platitudes upon the wages of sin. He had made it interesting. Besides, he felt in a good humour—it would surely be a boy! The procedure of the court bored him, but he was noticeably cheerful, almost gay. He thanked the inspector profusely for his evidence. Once he glanced at the clock casually, and said in an impressive voice:

“Perhaps we may say of the deceased—he lived a vicious life, but he died not ingloriously.”

The court broke up and he passed down into a quadrangle at the back where a pale sun filtered. Lawyers, ushers, court functionaries and police officials were scattering or talking in little groups. Standing outside a group he saw the spare figure of Inspector Tolozan. He touched his arm and smiled.

“Well, my friend, you established an interesting case. I feel that the verdict was just, and yet I cannot see that it in any way corroborates your theory of the accident of crime.”

Tolozan paused and blinked up at the sun.

“It did not corroborate, perhaps, but it did nothing to——”

“Well? This old man was an inveterate criminal. The fact that he loved a dog—it’s not a very great commendation. Many criminals do.”

“But they would not give their lives, monsieur. A man who would do that is capable of—I mean to say it was probably an accident that he was not a better man.”

“Possibly, possibly! But the record, my dear Tolozan!”

“One may only conjecture.”

“What is your conjecture?”

Tolozan gazed dreamily up at the Gothic tracery of the adjoining chapel. Then he turned to Monsieur Colbert and said very earnestly:

“You must remember that there was nothing against Laissac until the age of seventeen. He had been a boy of good character. His father was an honest wheelwright. At the age of seventeen the boy was to go to sea on the sailing ship *La Turenne*. Owing to some trouble with the customs authorities the sailing of the ship was delayed twenty-four hours. The boy was given shore leave. He hung about the docks. There was nothing to do. He had no money to spend on entertainment. My conjecture is this. Let us suppose it was a day like this, calm and sunny with a certain quiet exhilaration in the air. Eh? The boy wanders around the quays and stares in the shops. Suddenly at the corner of the Rue Bayard he peeps down into a narrow gally and beholds a sight which drives the blood wildly through his veins.”

“What sight, Monsieur Tolozan?”

“The Chinaman, Cheng Loo, being cruel to a dog.”

“Ah! I see your implication.”

“The boy sees red. There is the usual brawl and scuffle. He possibly does not realize his own strength. Follow the lawcourt and the penitentiary. Can you

not understand how such an eventuality would embitter him against society? To him in the hereafter the dog would stand as the symbol of patient suffering, humanity as the tyrant. He would be at war for ever, an outcast, a derelict. He was raw, immature, uneducated. He was at the most receptive stage. His sense of justice was outraged. The penitentiary made him a criminal.”

“Then from this you mean——”

“I mean that if the good ship *La Turenne* had sailed to time, or if he had not been given those few hours’ leave, he might by this time have been a master mariner, or in any case a man who could look the world in the face. That is what I mean by the accident——”

“Excuse me.”

A messenger had handed Monsieur Colbert a telegram. He tore it open feverishly and glanced at the contents. An expression of annoyance crept over his features. He tore the form up in little pieces and threw it petulantly upon the ground. He glanced up at Tolozan absently as though he had seen him for the first time. Then he muttered vaguely:

“The accident, eh? Oh, yes, yes. Quite so, quite so.”

But he did not tell Inspector Tolozan what the telegram contained.

## “OLD FAGS”

**T**HE boys called him “Old Fags,” and the reason was not far to seek. He occupied a room in a block of tenements off Lisson Grove, bearing the somewhat grandiloquent title of Bolingbroke Buildings, and conspicuous among the many doubtful callings that occupied his time was one in which he issued forth with a deplorable old canvas sack, which, after a day’s peregrination along the gutters, he would manage to partly fill with cigar and cigarette ends. The exact means by which he managed to convert this patiently gathered garbage into the wherewithal to support his disreputable body nobody took the trouble to enquire. Neither were their interests any further aroused by the disposal of the contents of the same sack when he returned with the gleanings of dustbins distributed thoughtfully at intervals along certain thoroughfares by a maternal borough council.

No one had ever penetrated to the inside of his room, but the general opinion in Bolingbroke Buildings was that he managed to live in a state of comfortable filth. And Mrs. Read, who lived in the room opposite, No. 477, with her four children was of opinion that “Old Fags ’ad ’oarded up a bit.”

He certainly never seemed to be behind with the payment of the weekly three-and-sixpence that entitled him to the sole enjoyment of No. 475, and when the door was opened, among the curious blend of odours that issued forth, that of onions and other luxuries of this sort was undeniable.

Nevertheless, he was not a popular figure in the Buildings. Many, in fact, looked upon him as a social blot on the Bolingbroke escutcheon. The inhabitants were mostly labourers and their wives, charwomen and lady helps, dressmakers' assistants, and several mechanics. There was a vague tentative effort among a great body of them to be a little respectable, and among some even to be clean.

No such uncomfortable considerations hampered the movements of Old Fags. He was frankly and ostentatiously a social derelict. He had no pride and no shame. He shuffled out in the morning, his blotchy face covered with dirt and black hair, his threadbare green clothes tattered and in rags, the toes all too visible through his forlorn-looking boots. He was rather a large man with a fat, flabby person and a shiny face that was over-affable and bleary through a too constant attention to the gin bottle. He had a habit of ceaseless talk. He talked and chuckled to himself all the time, he talked to every one he met in an undercurrent of jeering affability. Sometimes he would retire to his room with a gin bottle for days together and then (the walls at Bolingbroke Buildings are not very thick) he would be heard

to talk and chuckle and snore alternately, until the percolating atmosphere of stewed onions heralded the fact that Old Fags was shortly on the war-path again.

He would meet Mrs. Read with her children on the stairs and would mutter, "Oh, here we are again! All these dear little children been out for a walk, eh? Oh, these dear little children!" and he would pat one of them gaily on the head.

And Mrs. Read would say: "'Ere, you keep your filthy 'ands off my kids, you dirty old swine, or I'll catch you a swipe over the mouth!"

And Old Fags would shuffle off muttering: "Oh, dear! Oh, dear! these dear little children! Oh, dear! Oh, dear!"

And the boys would call after him and even throw orange peel and other things at him, but nothing seemed to disturb the serenity of Old Fags. Even when young Charlie Good threw a dead mouse that hit him on the chin he only said: "Oh, these boys! these *boys!*"

Quarrels, noise and bad odours were the prevailing characteristics of Bolingbroke Buildings and Old Fags, though contributing in some degree to the latter quality, rode serenely through the other two in spite of multiform aggression. The penetrating intensity of his onion stews had driven two lodgers already from No. 476, and was again a source of aggravation to the present holders, old Mrs. Birdle and her daughter Minnie.



Minnie Birdle was what was known as a “tweeny” at a house in Hyde Park Square, but she lived at home. Her mistress—to whom she had never spoken, being engaged by the housekeeper—was Mrs. Bastien-Melland, a lady who owned a valuable collection of little dogs. These little dogs somehow gave Minnie an unfathomable sense of respectability. She loved to talk about them. She told Mrs. Read that her mistress paid “’undreds and ’undreds of pahnds for each of them.” They were taken out every day by a groom on two leads of five—ten highly groomed, bustling, yapping, snapping, vicious little luxuries. Some had won prizes at dog shows, and two men were engaged for the sole purpose of ministering to their creature comforts.

The consciousness of working in a house which furnished such an exhibition of festive cultivation brought into sharp relief the degrading social condition of her next room neighbour.

Minnie hated Old Fags with a bitter hatred. She even wrote to a firm of lawyers who represented some remote landlord and complained of “the dirty habits of the old drunken wretch next door.” But she never received any answer to her complaint. It was known that Old Fags had lived there for seven years and paid his rent regularly.

Moreover, on one critical occasion, Mrs. Read, who had periods of rheumatic gout, and could not work, had got into hopeless financial straits, having reached the very limit of her borrowing capacity, and

being three weeks in arrears with her rent, Old Fags had come over and had insisted on lending her fifteen shillings! Mrs. Read eventually paid it back, and the knowledge of the transaction further accentuated her animosity toward him.

One day Old Fags was returning from his dubious round and was passing through Hyde Park Square with his canvas bag slung over his back, when he ran into the cortège of little dogs under the control of Meads, the groom.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" muttered Old Fags to himself. "What dear little dogs! H'm! What dear little dogs!"

A minute later Minnie Birdle ran up the area steps and gave Meads a bright smile.

"Good-night, Mr. Meads," she said.

Mr. Meads looked at her and said: "'Ullo! you off?"

"Yes!" she answered.

"Oh, well," he said, "Good-night! Be good!"

They both sniggered and Minnie hurried down the street. Before she reached Lisson Grove Old Fags had caught her up.

"I say," he said, getting into her stride. "What dear little dogs those are! Oh, dear! what dear little dogs!"

Minnie turned, and when she saw him her face flushed, and she said: "Oh, you go to hell!" with which unladylike expression she darted across the road and was lost to sight.

“Oh, these women!” said Old Fags to himself, “these *women!*”

It often happened after that Old Fags’s business carried him in the neighbourhood of Hyde Park Square, and he ran into the little dogs. One day he even ventured to address Meads, and to congratulate him on the beauty of his canine protégés, an attention that elicited a very unsympathetic response, a response, in fact, that amounted to being told to “clear off.”

The incident of Old Fags running into this society was entirely accidental. It was due in part to the fact that the way lay through there to a tract of land in Paddington that Old Fags seemed to find peculiarly attractive. It was a neglected strip of ground by the railway that butted at one end on to a canal. It would have made quite a good siding but that it seemed somehow to have been overlooked by the railway company and to have become a dumping ground for tins and old refuse from the houses in the neighbourhood of Harrow Road. Old Fags would spend hours there alone with his canvas bag.

When winter came on there was a great wave of what the papers call “economic unrest.” There were strikes in three great industries, a political upheaval, and a severe “tightening of the money market.” All these misfortunes reacted on Bolingbroke Buildings. The dwellers became even more impecunious, and consequently more quarrelsome, more noisy and more malodorous. Rents were all in

arrears, ejections were the order of the day, and borrowing became a tradition rather than an actuality. Want and hunger brooded over the dejected buildings. But still Old Fags came and went, carrying his shameless gin and permeating the passages with his onion stews.

Old Mrs. Birdle became bedridden and the support of room No. 476 fell on the shoulders of Minnie. The wages of a "tweeny" are not excessive, and the way in which she managed to support herself and her invalid mother must have excited the wonder of the other dwellers in the building if they had not had more pressing affairs of their own to wonder about. Minnie was a short, sallow little thing, with a rather full figure, and heavy gray eyes that somehow conveyed a sense of sleeping passion. She had a certain instinct for dress, a knack of putting some trinket in the right place, and of always being neat.

Mrs. Bastien-Melland had one day asked who she was. On being informed, her curiosity did not prompt her to push the matter further, and she did not speak to her, but the incident gave Minnie a better standing in the domestic household at Hyde Park Square. It was probably this attention that caused Meads, the head dog-groom, to cast an eye in her direction. It is certain that he did so, and, moreover, on a certain Thursday evening had taken her to a cinema performance in the Edgware Road. Such attention naturally gave rise to discussion and alas! to jealousy, for there was an under housemaid

and even a lady's maid who were not impervious to the attentions of the good-looking groom.

When Mrs. Bastien-Melland went to Egypt in January she took only three of the small dogs with her, for she could not be bothered with the society of a groom, and three dogs were as many as her two maids could spare time for after devoting their energies to Mrs. Bastien-Melland's toilette. Consequently, Meads was left behind, and was held directly responsible for seven, five Chows and two Pekinese, or, as he expressed it, “over a thousand pounds worth of dogs.”

It was a position of enormous responsibility. They had to be fed on the very best food, all carefully prepared and cooked and in small quantities. They had to be taken for regular exercise and washed in specially prepared condiments. Moreover, at the slightest symptom of indisposition he was to telephone to Sir Andrew Fossiter, the great veterinary specialist, in Hanover Square. It is not to be wondered at that Meads became a person of considerable standing and envy, and that little Minnie Birdle was intensely flattered when he occasionally condescended to look in her direction. She had been in Mrs. Bastien-Melland's service now for seven months and the attentions of the dog-groom had not only been a matter of general observation for some time past, but had become a subject of reckless mirth and innuendo among the other servants.

One night she was hurrying home. Her mother

had been rather worse than usual of late, and she was carrying a few scraps that the cook had given her. It was a wretched night and she was not feeling well herself, a mood of tired dejection possessed her. She crossed the drab street off Lisson Grove and as she reached the curb her eye lighted on Old Fags. He did not see her. He was walking along the gutter patting the road occasionally with his stick.

She had not spoken to him since the occasion we have mentioned. For once he was not talking: his eyes were fixed in listless apathy on the road. As he passed she caught the angle of his chin silhouetted against the window of a shop. For the rest of her walk the haunting vision of that chin beneath the drawn cheeks, and the brooding hopelessness of those sunken eyes, kept recurring to her. Perhaps in some remote past he had been as good to look upon as Meads, the groom! Perhaps some one had cared for him! She tried to push this thought from her, but some chord in her nature seemed to have been awakened and to vibrate with an unaccountable sympathy toward this undesirable fellow-lodger.

She hurried home and in the night was ill. She could not go to Mrs. Melland's for three days and she wanted the money badly. When she got about again she was subject to fainting fits and sickness. On one such occasion, as she was going upstairs, at the Buildings, she felt faint, and leant against the wall just as Old Fags was going up. He stopped and said: "Hullo, now, what are we doing? Oh,

dear! Oh, dear!” and she said: “It’s all right, old ’un.” These were the kindest words she had ever spoken to Old Fags.

During the next month there were strange symptoms about Minnie Birdle that caused considerable comment, and there were occasions when old Mrs. Birdle pulled herself together and became the active partner and waited on Minnie. On one such occasion Old Fags came home late and, after drawing a cork, varied his usual programme of talking and snoring by singing in a maudlin key, and old Mrs. Birdle came banging at his door and shrieked out: “Stop your row, you old——. My daughter is ill. Can’t you hear?” And Old Fags came to his door and blinked at her and said: “Ill, is she? Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Would she like some stew, eh?” And old Mrs. Birdle said: “No, she don’t want any of your muck,” and bundled back. But they did not hear any more of Old Fags that night or any other night when Minnie came home queer.

Early in March Minnie got the sack from Hyde Park Square. Mrs. Melland was still away, having decided to winter in Rome; but the housekeeper assumed the responsibility of this action, and in writing to Mrs. Melland justified the course she had taken by saying that “she could not expect the other maids to work in the same house with an unmarried girl in that condition.” Mrs. Melland, whose letter in reply was full of the serious illness of poor little Anisette (one of the Chows), that she had suffered

in Egypt on account of a maid giving it too much rice with its boned chicken, and how much better it had been in Rome under the treatment of Doctor Lascati, made no special reference to the question of Minnie Birdle, only saying that "she was *so* sorry if Mrs. Bellingham was having trouble with these tiresome servants."

The spring came and the summer, and the two inhabitants of Room 476 eked out their miserable existence. One day Minnie would pull herself together and get a day's charing, and occasionally Mrs. Birdle would struggle along to a laundry in Maida Vale where a benevolent proprietress would pay her one shilling and threepence to do a day's ironing, for the old lady was rather neat with her hands. And once when things were very desperate the brother of a nephew from Walthamstow turned up. He was a small cabinet maker by trade, and he agreed to allow them three shillings a week "till things righted themselves a bit." But nothing was seen of Meads, the groom. One night Minnie was rather worse and the idea occurred to her that she would like to send a message to him. It was right that he should know. He had made no attempt to see her since she had left Mrs. Melland's service. She lay awake thinking of him and wondering how she could send a message, when she suddenly thought of Old Fags. He had been quiet of late, whether the demand for cigarette ends was abating and he could not afford the luxuries that their disposal seemed to



supply, or whether he was keeping quiet for any ulterior reason she was not able to determine.

In the morning she sent her mother across to ask him if he would "oblige by calling at Hyde Park Square and asking Mr. Meads if he would oblige by calling at 476, Bolingbroke Buildings, to see Miss Birdle." There is no record of how Old Fags delivered this message, but it is known that that same afternoon Mr. Meads did call. He left about three-thirty in a great state of perturbation and in a very bad temper. He passed Old Fags on the stairs, and the only comment he made was: "I never have any luck! God help me!" and he did not return, although he had apparently promised to do so.

In a few weeks' time the position of the occupants of Room 476 became desperate. It was, in fact, a desperate time all round. Work was scarce and money scarcer. Waves of ill-temper and depression swept Bolingbroke Buildings. Mrs. Read had gone—heaven knows where. Even Old Fags seemed at the end of his tether. True, he still managed to secure his inevitable bottle, but the stews became scarcer and less potent. All Mrs. Birdle's time and energy were taken up in nursing Minnie, and the two somehow existed on the money now increased to four shillings a week, which the sympathetic cabinet maker from Walthamstow allowed them. The question of rent was shelved. Four shillings a week for two people means ceaseless gnawing hunger. The widow and her daughter lost pride and hope, and

further messages to Mr. Meads failed to elicit any response. The widow became so desperate that she even asked Old Fags one night if he could spare a little stew for her daughter who was starving. The pungent odour of the hot food was too much for her. Old Fags came to the door.

“Oh, dear! Oh, dear!” he said. “What trouble there is! Let’s see what we can do!”

He messed about for some time and then took it across to them. It was a strange concoction. Meat that it would have been difficult to know what to ask for at the butcher’s, and many bones, but the onions seemed to pull it together. To any one starving it was good. After that it became a sort of established thing—whenever Old Fags *had* a stew he sent some over to the widow and daughter. But apparently things were not doing too well in the cigarette end trade, for the stews became more and more intermittent, and sometimes were desperately “boney.”

And then one night a terrible climax was reached. Old Fags was awakened in the night by fearful screams. There was a district nurse in the next room, and also a student from a great hospital. No one knows how it all affected Old Fags. He went out at a very unusual hour in the early morning, and seemed more garrulous and meandering in his speech. He stopped the widow in the passage and mumbled incomprehensible solicitude. Minnie was very ill for three days, but she recovered, faced by the insoluble proposition of feeding three mouths

instead of two, and two of them requiring enormous quantities of milk.

This terrible crisis brought out many good qualities in various people. The cabinet maker sent ten shillings extra and others came forward as though driven by some race instinct. Old Fags disappeared for ten days after that. It was owing to an unfortunate incident in Hyde Park when he insisted on sleeping on a flower bed with a gin-bottle under his left arm, and on account of the uncompromising attitude that he took up toward a policeman in the matter. When he returned things were assuming their normal course. Mrs. Birdle's greeting was:

“Ullo, old 'un, we've missed your stoos.”

But Old Fags had undoubtedly secured a more stable position in the eyes of the Birdles, and one day he was even allowed to see the baby.

He talked to it from the door. “Oh, dear! Oh, dear!” he said. “What a beautiful little baby! What a dear little baby! Oh, dear! Oh, dear!”

The baby shrieked with unrestrained terror at sight of him, but that night some more stew was sent in.

Then the autumn came on. People whose romantic instincts had been touched at the arrival of the child gradually lost interest and fell away. The cabinet maker from Walthamstow wrote a long letter saying that after next week the payment of the four shillings would have to stop. He “hoped he had been of some help in their trouble, but that things

were going on all right now. Of course he had to think of his own family first," and so on. The lawyers of the remote landlord, who was assiduously killing stags in Scotland, "regretted that their client could not see his way to allow any further delay in the matter of the payment of rent due." The position of the Birdle family became once more desperate. Old Mrs. Birdle had become frailer, and though Minnie could now get about she found work difficult to obtain, owing to people's demand for a character from the last place. Their thoughts once more reverted to Meads, and Minnie lay in wait for him one morning as he was taking the dogs out. There was a very trying scene ending in a very vulgar quarrel, and Minnie came home and cried all the rest of the day and through half the night. Old Fags's stews became scarcer and less palatable. He, too, seemed in dire straits.

We now come to an incident that we are ashamed to say owes its inception to the effect of alcohol. It was a wretched morning in late October, bleak and foggy. The blue-gray corridors of Bolingbroke Buildings seemed to exude damp. The strident voices of the unkempt children quarrelling in the courtyard below permeated the whole Buildings. The strange odour that was its characteristic lay upon it like the foul breath of some evil god. All its inhabitants seemed hungry, wretched and vile. Their lives of constant protest seemed for the moment lulled to a sullen indifference, whilst they

huddled behind their gloomy doors and listened to the rancorous railings of their offspring. The widow Birdle and her daughter sat silently in their room. The child was asleep. It had had its milk, and it would have to have its milk whatever happened. The crumbs from the bread the women had had at breakfast lay ungathered on the bare table. They were both hungry and very desperate. There was a knock at the door, Minnie went to it, and there stood Old Fags. He leered at them meekly and under his arm carried a gin-bottle three parts full.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" he said. "What a dreadful day! What a dreadful day! Will you have a little drop of gin to comfort you? Now! What do you say?"

Minnie looked at her mother; in other days the door would have been slammed in his face, but Old Fags had certainly been kind in the matter of the stews. They asked him to sit down. Then old Mrs. Birdle did accept "just a tiny drop" of gin, and they both persuaded Minnie to have a little. Now neither of the women had had food of any worth for days, and the gin went straight to their heads. It was already in Old Fags's head firmly established. The three immediately became garrulous. They all talked volubly and intimately. The women railed Old Fags about his dirt, but allowed that he had "a good 'eart." They talked longingly and lovingly about his "stoos," and Old Fags said:

“Well, my dears, you shall have the finest stoo you’ve ever had in your lives to-night.”

He repeated this nine times, only each time the whole sentence sounded like one word. Then the conversation drifted to the child, and the hard lot of parents, and by a natural sequence to Meads, its father. Meads was discussed with considerable bitterness, and the constant reiteration of the threat by the women that they meant “to ’ave the lor on ’im all right,” mingled with the jeering sophistries of Old Fags on the “genalman’s behaviour,” and the impossibility of expecting “a dog-groom to be sportsman,” lasted a considerable time.

Old Fags talked expansively about “leaving it to him,” and somehow as he stood there with his large puffy figure looming up in the dimly lighted room, and waving his long arms, he appeared to the women a figure of portentous significance. He typified powers they had not dreamt of. Under the veneer of his hide-bound depravity Minnie seemed to detect some slow-moving force trying to assert itself. He meandered on in a vague monologue, using terms and expressions they did not know the meaning of. He gave the impression of some fettered animal launching a fierce indictment against the fact of its life. At last he took up the gin-bottle and moved to the door and then leered round the room. “You shall have the finest stoo you’ve ever had in your life to-night, my dears!” He repeated this seven times again and then went heavily out.

That afternoon a very amazing fact was observed by several inhabitants of Bolingbroke Buildings. Old Fags washed his face! He went out about three o'clock without his sack. His face had certainly been cleaned up and his clothes seemed in some mysterious fashion to hold together. He went across Lisson Grove and made for Hyde Park Square. He hung about for nearly an hour at the corner, and then he saw a man come up the area steps of a house on the south side and walk rapidly away. Old Fags followed him. He took a turning sharp to the left through a mews and entered a narrow street at the end. There he entered a deserted-looking pub. kept by an ex-butler and his wife. He passed right through to a room at the back and called for some beer. Before it was brought Old Fags was seated at the next table ordering gin.

“Dear, oh dear! what a wretched day!” said Old Fags.

The groom grunted assent. But Old Fags was not to be put off by mere indifference. He broke ground on one or two subjects that interested the groom, one subject in particular being dog. He seemed to have a profound knowledge of dog, and before Mr. Meads quite realized what was happening he was trying gin in his beer at Old Fags's expense. The groom was feeling particularly morose that afternoon. His luck seemed out. Bookmakers had appropriated several half-crowns that he sorely begrudged, and he had other expenses. The beer-

gin mixture comforted him, and the rambling eloquence of the old fool who seemed disposed to be content paying for drinks and talking, fitted in with his mood.

They drank and talked for a full hour, and at length got to a subject that all men get to sooner or later if they drink and talk long enough—the subject of woman. Mr. Meads became confiding and philosophic. He talked of women in general and what triumphs and adventures he had had among them in particular. But what a trial and tribulation they had been to him in spite of all. Old Fags winked knowingly and was splendidly comprehensive and tolerant of Meads's peccadillos.

"It's all a game," said Meads. "You've got to manage 'em. There ain't much I don't know, old bird!"

Then suddenly Old Fags leaned forward in the dark room and said:

"No, Mr. Meads, but you ought to play the game you know. Oh, dear, yes!"

"What do you mean, *Mister Meads*?" said that gentleman sharply.

"Minnie Birdle, eh? you haven't mentioned Minnie Birdle yet!" said Old Fags.

"What the devil are you talking about?" said Meads drunkenly.

"She's starving," said Old Fags, "starving, wretched, alone with her old mother and your child. Oh, dear! yes, it's terrible!"



Meads's eyes flashed with a sullen frenzy, but fear was gnawing at his heart, and he felt more disposed to placate this mysterious old man than to quarrel with him.

“I tell you I have no luck,” he said after a pause. Old Fags looked at him gloomily and ordered some more gin. When it was brought he said:

“You ought to play the game, you know, Mr. Meads—after all—luck? Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Would you rather be the woman? Five shillings a week you know would——”

“No, I'm damned if I do!” cried Meads fiercely. “It's all right for all these women. Gawd! How do I know if it's true? Look here, old bird, do you know I'm already done in for two five bobs a week, eh? One up in Norfolk and the other at Enfield. Ten shillings a week of my——money goes to these blasted women. No fear, no more, I'm through with it!”

“Oh, dear! Oh, dear!” said Old Fags, and he moved a little further into the shadow of the room and watched the groom out of the depths of his sunken eyes. But Meads's courage was now fortified by the fumes of a large quantity of fiery alcohol, and he spoke witheringly of women in general and seemed disposed to quarrel if Old Fags disputed his right to place them in the position that Meads considered their right and natural position. But Old Fags gave no evidence of taking up the challenge: on the contrary he seemed to suddenly shift his ground.

He grinned and leered and nodded at Meads's string of coarse sophistry, and suddenly he touched him on the arm and looked round the room and said very confidentially:

"Oh, dear! yes, Mr. Meads. Don't take too much to heart what I said."

And then he sniffed and whispered:

"I could put you on to a very nice thing, Mr. Meads. I could introduce you to a lady I know would take a fancy to you, and you to her. Oh, dear, yes!"

Meads pricked up his ears like a fox-terrier and his small eyes glittered.

"Oh!" he said. "Are you one of those, eh, old bird? Who is she?"

Old Fags took out a piece of paper and fumbled with a pencil. He then wrote down a name and address somewhere at Shepherd's Bush.

"What's a good time to call?" said Meads.

"Between six and seven," answered Old Fags.

"Oh, hell!" said Meads, "I can't do it. I've got to get back and take the dogs out at half-past five, old bird. From half-past five to half-past six. The missus is back, she'll kick up a hell of a row."

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" said Old Fags. "What a pity! The young lady is going away, too!"

He thought for a moment, and then an idea seemed to strike him.

"Look here, would you like me to meet you and take the dogs round the park till you return?"

“What!” said Meads. “Trust you with a thousand pounds’ worth of dogs! Not much!”

“No, no, of course not, I hadn’t thought of that!” said Old Fags humbly.

Meads looked at him, and it is very difficult to tell what it was about the old man that gave him a sudden feeling of complete trust. The ingenuity of his speech, the ingratiating confidence that a mixture of beer-gin gives, tempered by the knowledge that famous pedigree Pekinese would be almost impossible to dispose of, perhaps it was a combination of these motives. In any case a riotous impulse drove him to fall in with Old Fags’s suggestion, and he made the appointment for half-past five.

\* \* \* \* \*

Evening had fallen early, and a fine rain was driving in fitful gusts when the two met at the corner of Hyde Park. There were ten little dogs on their lead, and Meads with a cap pulled close over his eyes.

“Oh, dear! Oh, dear!” cried Old Fags as he approached. “What dear little dogs! What dear little dogs!”

Meads handed the lead over to Old Fags, and asked more precise instructions of the way to get to the address.

“What are you wearing that canvas sack inside your coat for, old bird, eh?” asked Meads, when these instructions had been given.

“Oh, my dear sir,” said Old Fags. “If you had the asthma like I get it, and no underclothes on these damp days! Oh, dear! Oh, dear!”

He wheezed drearily and Meads gave him one or two more exhortations about the extreme care and tact he was to observe.

“Be very careful with that little Chow on the left lead. 'E's got his coat on, see? 'E's 'ad a chill and you must keep 'im on the move. Gently, see?”

“Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Poor little chap! What's his name?” said Old Fags.

“Pelleas,” answered Mr. Meads.

“Oh, poor little Pelleas! Poor little Pelleas! Come along. You won't be too long, Mr. Meads, will you?”

“You bet I won't,” said the groom, and nodding he crossed the road rapidly and mounting a Shepherd's Bush motor-bus he set out on his journey to an address that didn't exist.

Old Fags ambled slowly round the Park, snuffling and talking to the dogs. He gauged the time when Meads would be somewhere about Queen's Road, then he ambled slowly back to the point from which he had started. With extreme care he piloted the small army across the high road and led them in the direction of Paddington. He drifted with leisurely confidence through a maze of small streets. Several people stopped and looked at the dogs, and the boys barked and mimicked them, but nobody took the trouble to look at Old Fags. At length he came to a

district where their presence seemed more conspicuous. Rows of squalid houses and advertisement hoardings. He slightly increased his pace, and a very stout policeman standing outside a funeral furnisher's glanced at him with a vague suspicion. However, in strict accordance with an ingrained officialism that hates to act “without instructions,” he let the cortège pass. Old Fags wandered through a wretched street that seemed entirely peopled by children. Several of them came up and followed the dogs.

“Dear little dogs, aren't they? Oh my, yes, dear little dogs!” he said to the children. At last he reached a broad gloomy thoroughfare with low irregular buildings on one side, and an interminable length of hoardings on the other that screened a strip of land by the railway—land that harboured a wilderness of tins and garbage. Old Fags led the dogs along by the hoarding. It was very dark. Three children, who had been following, tired of the pastime, had drifted away. He went along once more. There was a gap in a hoarding on which was notified that “Pogram's Landaulettes could be hired for the evening at an inclusive fee of two guineas. Telephone, 47901 Mayfair.”

The meagre light from a street lamp thirty yards away revealed a colossal coloured picture of a very beautiful young man and woman stepping out of a car and entering a gorgeous restaurant, having evidently just enjoyed the advantage of this peerless

luxury. Old Fags went on another forty yards and then returned. There was no one in sight.

“Oh, dear little dogs,” he said. “Oh, dear! Oh, dear! What dear little dogs! Just through here, my pretty pets. Gentle, Pelleas! Gently, very gently! There, there, there! Oh, what dear little dogs!”

He stumbled forward through the quagmire of desolation, picking his way as though familiar with every inch of ground, to the further corner where it was even darker, and where the noise of shunting freight trains drowned every other murmur of the night.

\* \* \* \* \*

It was eight o'clock when Old Fags reached his room in Bolingbroke Buildings carrying his heavily laden sack across his shoulders. The child in Room 476 had been peevish and fretful all the afternoon and the two women were lying down exhausted. They heard Old Fags come in. He seemed very busy, banging about with bottles and tins and alternately coughing and wheezing. But soon the potent aroma of onions reached their nostrils and they knew he was preparing to keep his word.

At nine o'clock he staggered across with a steaming saucepan of hot stew. In contrast to the morning's conversation, which though devoid of self-consciousness, had taken on at times an air of moribund

analysis, making little stabs at fundamental things, the evening passed off on a note of almost joyous levity. The stew was extremely good to the starving women, and Old Fags developed a vein of fantastic pleasantry. He talked unceasingly, sometimes on things they understood, sometimes on matters of which they were entirely ignorant and sometimes he appeared to them obtuse, maudlin and incoherent.

Nevertheless he brought to their room a certain light-hearted raillery that had never visited it before. No mention was made of Meads. The only blemish to the serenity of this bizarre supper party was that Old Fags developed intervals of violent coughing, intervals when he had to walk around the room and beat his chest. These fits had the unfortunate result of waking the baby. When this undesirable result had occurred for the fourth time Old Fags said:

“Oh, dear! Oh, dear! This won’t do! Oh, no, this won’t do. I must go back to my hotel!” a remark that caused paroxysms of mirth to old Mrs. Birdle.

Nevertheless, Old Fags retired and it was then just on eleven o’clock. The women went to bed, and all through the night Minnie heard the old man coughing. And while he is lying in this unfortunate condition let us follow the movements of Mr. Meads.

Meads jumped off the ’bus at Shepherd’s Bush and hurried quickly in the direction that Old Fags had instructed him. He asked three people for the

Pomeranian Road before an errand boy told him that he "believed it was somewhere off Giles Avenue," but at Giles Avenue no one seemed to know it. He retraced his steps in a very bad temper and enquired again. Five other people had never heard of it. So he went to a post office and a young lady in charge informed him that there was no such road in the neighbourhood.

He tried other roads whose names vaguely resembled it, then he came to the conclusion "that that blamed old fool had made a silly mistake." He took a 'bus back with a curious fear gnawing at the pit of his stomach, a fear that he kept thrusting back; he dare not allow himself to contemplate it. It was nearly seven-thirty when he got back to Hyde Park and his eye quickly scanned the length of railing near which Old Fags was to be. Immediately that he saw no sign of him or the little dogs, a horrible feeling of physical sickness assailed him. The whole truth flashed through his mind. He saw the fabric of his life crumble to dust. He was conscious of visions of past acts and misdeeds tumbling over each other in a furious kaleidoscope.

The groom was terribly frightened. Mrs. Bastien-Melland would be in at eight o'clock to dinner, and the first thing she would ask for would be the little dogs. They were never supposed to go out after dark, but he had been busy that afternoon and arranged to take them out later. How was he to account for himself and their loss? He visualized



himself in a dock, and all sorts of other horrid things coming up—a forged character, an affair in Norfolk and another at Enfield, and a little trouble with a bookmaker seven years ago. For he felt convinced that the dogs had gone for ever, and Old Fags with them.

He cursed blindly in his soul at his foul luck and the wretched inclination that had lured him to drink “beer-gin” with the old thief. Forms of terrific vengeance passed through his mind, if he should meet the old devil again. In the meantime what should he do? He had never even thought of making Old Fags give him any sort of address. He dared not go back to Hyde Park Square without the dogs. He ran breathlessly up and down peering in every direction. Eight o’clock came and there was still no sign! Suddenly he remembered Minnie Birdle. He remembered that the old ruffian had mentioned and seemed to know Minnie Birdle. It was a connection that he had hoped to have wiped out of his life, but the case was desperate.

Curiously enough, during his desultory courtship of Minnie he had never been to her home, but on the only occasion when he had visited it, after the birth of the child, he had done so under the influence of three pints of beer, and he hadn’t the faintest recollection now of the number or the block. He hurried there, however, in feverish trepidation. Now Bolingbroke Buildings harbour some eight hundred people, and it is a remarkable fact that although the Birdles

had lived there about a year, of the eleven people that Meads asked not one happened to know the name. People develop a profound sense of self-concentration in Bolingbroke Buildings. Meads wandered up all the stairs and through the slate-tile passages. Twice he passed their door without knowing it: on the first occasion only five minutes after Old Fags had carried a saucepan of steaming stew from No. 475 to No. 476.

At ten o'clock he gave it up. He had four shillings on him and he adjourned to a small "pub." hard by and ordered a tankard of ale, and, as an afterthought, three pennyworth of gin which he mixed in it. Probably he thought that this mixture, which was so directly responsible for the train of tragic circumstances that encompassed him, might continue to act in some manner toward a more desirable conclusion. It did indeed drive him to action of a sort, for he sat there drinking and smoking Navy Cut cigarettes, and by degrees he evolved a most engaging but impossible story of being lured to the river by three men and chloroformed, and when he came to, finding that the dogs and the men had gone. He drank a further quantity of "beer-gin" and rehearsed his rôle in detail, and at length brought himself to the point of facing Mrs. Bastien-Melland. . . .

It was the most terrifying ordeal of his life. The servants frightened him for a start. They almost shrieked when they saw him and drew back. Mrs. Bastien-Melland had left word that he was to go to a

breakfast-room in the basement directly he came in and she would see him. There was a small dinner party on that evening and an agitated game of bridge. Meads had not stood on the hearthrug of the breakfast-room two minutes before he heard the foreboding swish of skirts, the door burst open and Mrs. Bastien-Melland stood before him, a thing of penetrating perfumes, high-lights and trepidation.

She just said "Well!" and fixed her hard bright eyes on him. Meads launched forth into his improbable story, but he dared not look at her. He tried to gather together the pieces of the tale he had so carefully rehearsed in the "pub.," but he felt like some helpless bark at the mercy of a hostile battle fleet, the searchlights of Mrs. Melland's cruel eyes were concentrated on him, while a flotilla of small diamonds on her heaving bosom winked and glittered with a dangerous insolence. He was stumbling over a phrase about the effects of chloroform when he became aware that Mrs. Melland was not listening to the matter of his story, she was only concerned with the manner. Her lips were set and her straining eyes insisted on catching his. He looked full at her and caught his breath and stopped.

Mrs. Melland still staring at him was moving slowly to the door. A moment of panic seized him. He mumbled something and also moved toward the door. Mrs. Melland was first to grip the handle. Meads made a wild dive and seized her wrist. But Mrs. Bastien-Melland came of a hard-riding York-

shire family. She did not lose her head. She struck him across the mouth with her flat hand, and as he reeled back she opened the door and called to the servants. Suddenly Meads remembered that the rooms had a French window on to the garden. He pushed her clumsily against the door and sprang across the room. He clutched wildly at the bolts while Mrs. Melland's voice was ringing out:

“Catch that man! Hold him! Catch thief!”

But before the other servants had had time to arrive he managed to get through the door and to pull it to after him. His hand was bleeding with cuts from broken glass but he leapt the wall and got into the shadow of some shrubs three gardens away. He heard whistles blowing and the dominant voice of Mrs. Melland directing a hue and cry. He rested some moments, then panic seized him and he laboured over another wall and found the passage of a semi-detached house. A servant opened a door and looked out and screamed. He struck her wildly and unreasonably on the shoulder and rushed up some steps and got into a front garden. There was no one there and he darted into the street and across the road.

In a few minutes he was lost in a labyrinth of back streets and laughing hysterically to himself. He had two shillings and eightpence on him. He spent fourpence of this on whisky, and then another fourpence just before the pubs. closed. He struggled

vainly to formulate some definite plan of campaign. The only point that seemed terribly clear to him was that he must get away. He knew Mrs. Melland only too well. She would spare no trouble in hunting him down. She would exact the uttermost farthing. It meant gaol and ruin. The obvious impediment to getting away was that he had no money and no friends. He had not sufficient strength of character to face a tramp life. He had lived too long in the society of the pampered Pekinese. He loved comfort.

Out of the simmering tumult of his soul grew a very definite passion—the passion of hate. He developed a vast, bitter, scorching hatred for the person who had caused this ghastly climax to his unfortunate career—Old Fags. He went over the whole incidents of the day again, rapidly recalling every phase of Old Fags’s conversation and manner. What a blind fool he was not to have seen through the filthy old swine’s game! But what had he done with the dogs? Sold the lot for a pound, perhaps! The idea made Meads shiver. He slouched through the streets harbouring his pariah-like lust.

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We will not attempt to record the psychologic changes that harassed the soul of Mr. Meads during the next two days and nights, the ugly passions that stirred him and beat their wings against the night,

the tentative intuitions urging toward some vague new start, the various compromises he made with himself, his weakness and inconsistency that found him bereft of any quality other than the sombre shadow of some ill-conceived revenge. We will only note that on the evening of the day we mention he turned up at Bolingbroke Buildings. His face was haggard and drawn, his eyes blood-shot and his clothes tattered and muddy. His appearance and demeanour was unfortunately not so alien to the general character of Bolingbroke Buildings as to attract any particular attention, and he slunk like a wolf through the dreary passages and watched the people come and go.

It was at about a quarter to ten when he was going along a passage in Block "F" that he suddenly saw Minnie Birdle come out of one door and go into another. His small eyes glittered and he went on tip-toe. He waited till Minnie was quite silent in her room and then he went stealthily to Room 475. He tried the handle and it gave. He opened the door and peered in. There was a cheap tin lamp guttering on a box that dimly revealed a room of repulsive wretchedness. The furniture seemed mostly to consist of bottles and rags. But in one corner on a mattress he beheld the grinning face of his enemy—Old Fags. Meads shut the door silently and stood with his back to it.

"Oh!" he said. "So here we are at last, old bird, eh!"

This move was apparently a supremely successful dramatic coup, for Old Fags lay still, paralyzed with fear, no doubt.

"So this is our little 'ome, eh?" he continued, "where we bring little dogs and sell 'em. What have you got to say, you old——"

The groom's face blazed into a sudden accumulated fury. He thrust his chin forward and let forth a volley of frightful and blasting oaths. But Old Fags didn't answer; his shiny face seemed to be intensely amused with this outburst.

"We got to settle our little account, old bird, see?" and the suppressed fury of his voice denoted some physical climax. "Why the hell don't you answer?" he suddenly shrieked, and springing forward he lashed Old Fags across the cheek.

And then a terrible horror came over him. The cheek he had struck was as cold as marble and the head fell a little impotently to one side. Trembling, as though struck with an ague, the groom picked up the guttering lamp and held it close to the face of Old Fags. It was set in an impenetrable repose, the significance of which even the groom could not misunderstand. The features were calm and childlike, lit by a half smile of splendid tolerance that seemed to have over-ridden the temporary buffets of a queer world. Meads had no idea how long he stood there gazing horror-struck at the face of his enemy. He only knew that he was presently conscious that Minnie Birdle was standing by his side and as he

looked at her, her gaze was fixed on Old Fags and a tear was trickling down either cheek.

"'E's dead," she said. "Old Fags is dead. 'E died this morning of noomonyer."

She said this quite simply as though it was a statement that explained the wonder of her presence. She did not look at Meads or seem aware of him. He watched the flickering light from the lamp illumining the underside of her chin and nostrils and her quivering brows.

"'E's dead," she said again, and the statement seemed to come as an edict of dismissal as though love and hatred and revenge had no place in these fundamental things. Meads looked from her to the trowsled head leaning slightly to one side of the mattress and he felt himself in the presence of forces he could not comprehend. He put the lamp back quietly on the box and tip-toed from the room.

Out once more in the night, his breath came quickly and a certain buoyancy drove him on. He dared not contemplate the terror of that threshold upon which he had almost trodden. He only knew that out of the surging maelstrom of irresolution some fate had gripped him. He walked with a certain elasticity in the direction of Millwall. There would be doss-houses and docks there and many a good ship that glided forth to strange lands, carrying human freight of whom few questions would be asked, for the ship wanted them to ease her way through the regenerating seas. . . .



And in the cold hours of the early dawn Minnie Birdle lay awake listening to the rhythmic breathing of her child. And she thought of that strange old man less terrible now in his mask of death than when she had first known him. No one to-morrow would follow to his pauper's grave, and yet at one time—who knows? She dared not speculate upon the tangled skein of this difficult life that had brought him to this. She only knew that somehow from it she had drawn a certain vibrant force that made her build a monster resolution. Her child! She would be strong, she would throw her frail body between it and the shafts of an unthinking world. She leant across it, listening intensely, then kissed the delicate down upon its skull, crooning with animal satisfaction at the smell of its warm soft flesh.

## THE ANGEL OF ACCOMPLISHMENT

**I**N RECONSTRUCTING the sombre story which gathered round the professional association of those two clever men, James Wray and Francis Vallery, it is necessary to know a little of their early life and up-bringing. I am indebted very considerably to my friend, Timothy Rallish, for the light of his somewhat sardonic perceptions upon the character of Wray. They were at Marlborough together, and afterward at Oxford, although at different colleges; Timothy at Oriel, and Wray—as one would naturally expect—at Balliol.

“I used to like him,” said Timothy. “I suppose I was the only chap who did. They hated him at Marlborough; he was so confoundedly pious. Up at Oxford it was not so bad. There are always such a lot of precious people at Balliol; it doesn’t stand out so. He was an idealist, without a conscience, if you know what I mean. He set up impossible standards, never attempted to live up to them, or to observe whether any one else attempted to. His contempt for his fellow-creatures was almost abnormal. I think the whole attitude in some queer way came out of his music-madness. Music was the absorbing passion of his life, and even for the

best of that he never appeared to have a very great opinion. I believe he thought that Bach's compositions were not too bad, and for Beethoven he sometimes indulged in mild patronage. Schumann bored him, so did Wagner, and for Chopin's 'sentimental tripe' he had no use."

"I am talking now of Wray between the age of seventeen and twenty-three—the age when one's critical faculties are relentless, when one knows every darned thing, don't you know. I can't tell why I liked Wray. He did not—and never has—liked me. Perhaps there was something about the profundity of his discontent which appealed to me—his restlessness and detachment. I like people who are dissatisfied. But there was more than that about him: he was a spiritual wanton. I believe he would have sacrificed a city full of babies to perfect one musical phrase. You see, there was no reason at all why he should have gone up to Oxford. He was only interested in music, which has never been properly taught there. I think he liked to compose tone-poems in the society of rich men's sons who were only interested in sports and rag-time. The contact satisfied some cynical kink in his own nature. It was certainly nothing to do with the mediævalism of Oxford, which only bored him. O Lord! The things which bored Jimmy Wray when he was twenty-three!"

"At that time," I asked, "do you know anything of his standard of accomplishments?"

"Very little," replied Timothy. "Of course I

know nothing about music myself, but people who did know something used to differ considerably about Wray. I got the general impression that he was talented in a nebulous kind of way; that he had ideas but that they were too involved; that he could create atmosphere but that he couldn't construct. He was a very pretty boy at that time, with a thin æsthetic face, dark reflective eyes and two pink spots in the centre of each cheek. He had got out of all sport on the ground that he had a weak heart. It is certainly true that his father—who made a small fortune out of accordion-pleated skirts—died at an early age from heart disease. His mother was a gentle negative kind of woman, who lived at Bournemouth, knitted things for people, and distributed prizes at Girls' Friendly Societies. He also had two sisters, one, I believe, dabbled in Christian Science, the other married a sanitary inspector. They played no great part in Wray's life, neither did any of them, or any relative or ancestor, as far as I can find out, supply any note to account for the peculiarly individual precocity of James himself. Afterward, when he became famous, the whole family was almost shocked."

This conversation with Timothy impressed itself on my memory very vividly, for it occurred just after I had had an interview with Wray's mother. At that time the study and analysis of suppressions and complexes had not reached the degree of fashionable absurdity which it has at the present day, but

neurosis has always been a popular complaint amongst those people unlucky enough to be able to afford to indulge in it. As an ordinary, rather over-worked local practitioner, I can only give my opinion that neurosis only exists amongst that small minority of people who do not have to fight for existence.

It appears to me that this instinct of fighting for existence is born in every man or woman. When circumstances rob them of it they are apt to raise some artificial standard and fight for that, for fight they must. We have not reached the millennium. During my thirty-three years' experience in the medical profession I have never yet met the case of a man or a woman who worked hard for a living being neurotic, unless his or her constitution was already undermined by neurotic parentage. You may say that an artificial standard is as good a thing to fight for as a real standard, and so it may be. A man who fights for some spiritual cause is certainly as justified as a man who fights to earn bread and wine. It is all a question of equipoise. But a man who in Timothy's terms would "sacrifice a city full of babies to perfect one musical phrase" is in my opinion a lunatic.

But I am perfectly willing to admit that I may be wrong. For all I know the whole social fabric may be changing its face values. We can only act according to our lights. When Wray's mother came and spoke to me about him I knew nothing about the man. He was thirty-one then. I can see her

now, that gentle old lady, with silver curls and pleading eyes, extremely confiding and rather outraged. Such things didn't happen at Bournemouth. But, dear her, Jimmy had only been to Bournemouth once, and he refused to go again because—the trams didn't run on Sundays and it took him two hours to walk out of the town! Was ever such a ridiculous excuse offered! He was a dear boy, a lovable, clever—oh, brilliantly clever!—boy, but quite incomprehensible, and with such awful moods. Then with great solemn shaking curls, bobbing above the stiff corsets, worse than that—a terrible temper . . . cruel, vindictive, he might do anything in such moods. She regarded me alertly. I think she thought I might prescribe some pills—they do that in Bournemouth—one to be taken night and morning, will cure asthma, sluggish liver or homicidal mania.

I remarked obligingly that I would see the young man. But how was that to be done? He lived in Chelsea, a terrible, irreligious suburb of London, inhabited by artists and others . . . quite irresponsible people. Besides, he was so exclusive, so apt to be rude, even violent and abusive. He detested strangers. He was altogether so unlike his dear papa, who treated everyone even his *work-people* as though they were equals! And then came the terrible crux of the story. It appeared that on Jimmy Wray's solitary visit to Bournemouth he had murdered a cat. Not, mark you, an ordinary stray,

vagabond cat, but his mother's cat, his mother's own darling Pee-Wee. The cat, it appeared, had annoyed him for several nights when he was sitting up late, trying to compose. He had warned his mother that something would have to be done. He had appeared haggard and distraught in the mornings. But Mrs. Wray had not taken the matter very seriously. Such a trivial affair! Dear Pee-Wee! He was often like that. He made funny noises in the night. . . . There were several cats in the neighbouring houses, doubtless friends of Pee-Wee's. And then one night the appalling thing happened. Jimmy got up about one o'clock. He went out and picked up a piece of plank. He beat the cat to a pulp! He had never been to Bournemouth since. What can you suggest, Doctor Parsons?

I am quite sure that I should have suggested nothing, done nothing, had I not soon after come in touch with Timothy Rallish, who reported upon Wray in the manner I have stated. I was amused to hear Timothy say that he didn't know why he liked Wray. I knew the reason. It was because Timothy couldn't help liking every one. He was that kind of boy—rather short and stocky, with ingenuous blue eyes which sparkled at you through enormous gold-rimmed glasses. He found life absorbing. He had scrambled through Oxford, accomplishing nothing of note beyond making himself popular. His people were poor, and on coming down from Oxford he had plunged into the vagaries of journalism.

He was full of enthusiasms, and was always doing the donkey-work for some quack. He had a genius for compiling and card-indexing. He edited and sub-edited various treatises and anthologies. I remember that he once wrote a book with the impressive title, "Concentrate," for a South African pseudo-medical gentleman, who lived in Westminster and charged three guineas a visit for the treatment of concentration. Timothy wrote every word of the book, but when it was published the author was announced as Mr. Hambro MacManus, and this red-haired South African Scot who arranged his rooms in such a theatrical way in Ashley Gardens, and made mysterious passes and grunts over the back of people's heads, claimed the credit for it, and also the royalties. Timothy thought the whole episode extremely amusing.

"I never mind paying for experience," he said. "Poor old Mac! He was quite wrong in most of his theories, but somehow I liked him."

When I told Timothy about my interview with Mrs. Wray he was wildly enthusiastic at the idea of my visiting Jimmy Wray when I next went to London.

"It's no good going to him as a medical man, or letting him know that his mother sent you. You must just meet him socially. He is just possible on occasions. I could easily work it for you. I could introduce you when you are up in town. You could meet him casually at the Albatross Club or the



Café Royale. I should love to know what you think of him."

The whole matter passed out of my mind till five months later when I had occasion to visit London for a few days in connection with the idea of purchasing a half-practice from an old medical friend of mine in West Kensington.

Timothy immediately looked me up and reminded me about Wray. His method was characteristic. He came into my bedroom at the little hotel at Paddington, and, striking a sentimental attitude, began humming a well-known popular song. When I asked him what his particular ailment was he laughed and said:

"Don't you know that tune?"

"I've heard it, I believe."

"That's 'The Sheen of thy Golden Tresses,' the most popular song of the day, words by Francis Vallery, music by James Wray. How are the mighty fallen!"

I met Wray that same evening at the Albatross Club. Either Timothy's estimate of him was distorted, or he had altered considerably, or else we had struck him on a good night. He was quite charming to me. His dress was certainly a little affected, but he was still very good looking, and he had a quiet sense of fun, and was prepared to listen and to be entertained. I observed that he was appreciably more friendly to me than he was to Timothy. He had a curious high, rather squeaky voice as though

it had never cracked, and a laugh that corresponded. I could understand that this characteristic of him might easily get on one's nerves after a time. But on the whole I could find little to criticize about the man or his behaviour. He even invited me to visit him in his rooms at Chelsea. And there two nights later I met the great Francis Vallery.

In looking back after all these years, and trying to analyze the character of James Wray, it is impossible to do so without associating it with that of Francis Vallery. Their lives and characters dove-tailed and reacted upon one another in a bewildering degree. Physically, they were a strange contrast. Vallery was a heavy, masterful-looking man, with a wide loose mouth, sloping forehead, and cynical, watchful eyes. He was normally taciturn, unresponsive, and curiously brusque in his manners. By comparison Wray seemed slim, debonair, almost unsubstantial. I do not think they really liked each other from the first. On that evening when I saw them together in the Chelsea flat, I could tell by the expression of Vallery's face that Wray's high reedy voice and laughter irritated him. I also came to the conclusion before the evening was over that Vallery had a beast of a temper.

Once an argumentative young student made a remark contradicting a statement of Vallery's, and I saw the latter's eyes blaze with anger and saliva ooze to the corners of his large mouth. He said nothing, however. When we were leaving, the man in the

hall handed him his overcoat the wrong way round. Vallery snatched it angrily from his grasp and growled. I knew that Wray was also capable of murdering a cat in a fit of passion, so I said to myself that the happy association which produced "The Sheen of thy Golden Tresses" was not very likely to last.

And then comes the strange aspect of the case. The association between Wray and Vallery lasted for twenty-seven years, and became a by-word amongst English-speaking peoples.

In justice to the memory of them both I would like to hasten to add that they never again did anything quite so bad as "The Sheen of thy Golden Tresses." This song was a little difficult to account for. It was in a way their meeting ground, the plank from which they sprang. It was quite understandable Vallery writing the words, but quite incomprehensible Wray composing the music. It is not known and never will be known by what method or means Vallery influenced Wray to suddenly forsake his precious muse and write this appalling song. For a man who up to that time had considered Chopin "sentimental tripe" to turn suddenly round and write this ballad, which was devoid of any subtlety or distinction, is one of those things one can only state and leave to the imagination of the reader to account for. Vallery had certainly written a good deal of sentimental prose tripe at that time, but nothing quite so bad as that. I think they were

both a little ashamed of the song, and never mentioned it. It was nearly a year before anything else sprang from their united efforts, and then was produced the musical play, "The Oasis."

"The Oasis" was a great success and ran at the Lyric for over a year. It was an astonishingly clever work, notable for its complete unity. The words appeared to inspire the music; the music was a vivid expression of the words. You could not think of one without the other. If Vallery's libretto appeared ingenious and suggestive of melody, Wray's music had a literary and whimsical flavour of its own which helped the context enormously. It appeared as though from two extreme poles both men had gone half way to meet the other. Vallery had had little education. He was the son of an unsuccessful bookmaker from Nottingham.

Up to that time he had been known as a writer of jingles and sporting articles, but in "The Oasis" he displayed a considerable ingenuity of construction and a really mordant sense of fun. Wray came half-way down from his pinnacle of involved and atmospheric experiment to write simple melodic airs. It was rather amusing to observe in this work, and in others that followed, how he cunningly employed some of the lesser known themes of the despised Schumann and Chopin, adapted them, elaborated them and converted them into "songs of the day!"

Timothy and I, and some of the others who knew them both, were naturally intrigued to see how the

personal side of the association worked. Timothy offered to bet me five pounds that they would quarrel and separate within six months. It certainly seemed remarkable that they did not. It may have been a fortunate factor that two men working together on these lines do not necessarily work in the same room. Vallery brought Wray the libretto, and probably discussed it a little. He was profoundly ignorant of the technical side of music. Wray wrote the music and the lyrics; his partner was clever enough to see that these were good and there was little for him to criticize. They may have discussed joins, and turns and intervals, but there were no great points of cleavage over which they would be likely to fall foul.

During the succeeding five years, four Wray-Vallery productions were staged in London and New York, and companies went on the road with them. By that time they had established their reputation as a unique combination. They were beginning to make money and to be big people in the theatrical world. And Timothy and I were still awaiting the great quarrel. I had by that time joined my friend Doctor Brill in West Kensington, so that I was able to indulge occasionally in the society of Timothy's friends and to visit the theatre. The Wray-Vallery plays were a constant delight to me. I really believe that Timothy was more interested in the men than in their plays. But then he was like that. He would come and report to me the latest scandal

concerning them, and indeed their behaviour was always open to criticism of some sort.

One evening Vallery was arrested for assaulting the head waiter at the Amalfi restaurant because he moved his walking-stick from the corner of the room to an umbrella-stand. He escaped with a fine and a little gentle bantering from the Press. The more successful he became the more overbearing became his manners. He hardly troubled to speak to anyone, unless it was a pretty woman, or someone to whom it paid him to be polite. Upon Wray the effect was almost as disastrous, although it touched him in a different way. His manners in some ways improved, that is to say, he was more sociable and amenable. On the other hand he became more shallow and insincere, more of a *poseur*.

He adopted the garb of the eccentric genius. He was wildly extravagant, and took parties of girls to the Café Royale, and to an ornate bungalow he had hired at Maidenhead. He became less self-opinionated, but it was done as though opinion—no one's opinion—was of any consequence. It was as though he had lost something and the knowledge of it made him desperate. It was a known fact that during those early years of their association Wray and Vallery sometimes quarrelled, but the quarrel never reached an open rupture. Once Wray appeared in my consulting-room. He was looking haggard and ill. When I asked him the trouble he said:

“I'm not sleeping, Parsons.”

I advised the usual remedies, recommended a complete rest and change, but as I watched the restless movements of his features I realized how inadequate is the authority of a medical man. We may sometimes make a shrewd guess at the basic cause of a disaster, but no medicine or advice will cure a megalomaniac. Just as he was about to go he turned to me and with one of his quick appealing looks he gasped:

“I hate that man, Vallery!”

So you see the old faith in the fetish does not die. What did Wray expect me to do? Possibly he would have been better advised to have gone to a priest. That is, if he could have found a really nice impressive priest, any one would have done, if they had only had sufficient strength of character to change Wray. I thought of his rather futile old mother and I felt sorry for him. I said what I could. I tried to persuade him to give up his association with Vallery. I pointed out that his health was more important than his material success. It wasn't that, he tried to explain, not just the material success. He had quite a decent private income (inherited from his father in the accordion-pleated line). Then what was it? Wray was quite incoherent. He went off late in the evening, and I noticed after he had gone that he had left the prescription I had given him on the table in the hall!

On discussing the matter afterward with Timothy I said:

“What is it that keeps these men together?”

And for all it may be worth I will quote just what Timothy replied. For Timothy at that time had just married a charming girl, a former typist to a dental surgeon in Kilburn, and he was becoming something of a philosopher. This is what Timothy said:

“It is the angel of accomplishment, old man. When people are working, doing things together, especially if they are doing them in the face of difficulties, there is always some queer genie which presides over their affections. Comrades in battle, however opposed they may be temperamentally. . . Chaps who row in the same boat, play in the same team at cricket or football, or are up against things together. The angel of accomplishment presides over their fate. It’s afterward, or when they lose that united sense of conflict, that the trouble sometimes comes.”

In the light of what followed I found Timothy’s remarks interesting. It was during the production of their sixth success, “The Apple-pie Bed,” that the biggest cloud that had so far gathered over the Wray-Vallery combination made its appearance. And, as one might expect, it came in the form of a woman. Lydia Looe played the part of the *ingènue*, Myra, in “The Apple-pie Bed.” She was a pretty girl, not quite so ingenuous as she appeared on the stage, but in any case too good for either James Wray or Francis Vallery, who were both approaching



a rather dilapidated middle-age. How their rivalry over the charms of this new discovery never reached a crisis is a mystery to me. I spent a Sunday evening at Wray's flat when all concerned were present, and the look of venom that passed between the two men at the slightest success of either upon the lady's favour was positively frightening. The competition lasted eight months and Vallery appeared to be winning.

"If the matter is really settled," I thought, "I shall dread to pick up my newspaper."

Let me add that all this time the two men were working on a new play, "The Island in Arabia." Timothy said he had seen the figure of Wray all muffled up, hanging about outside Vallery's house in Knightsbridge late at night "looking like an apache." The crash was surely about to come, but in July the Gordian knot was severed by Lydia Looe running away with the business manager of a jam and pickle factory. "The Island in Arabia" was produced the following month and became one of the biggest successes of the series. We all hoped that the episode of Lydia Looe would tend to reconcile the two men, and so apparently it did. But the following year Vallery publicly accused Wray of swindling him. There was a fearful dispute between principals and their lawyers and the matter came into court. I forget the details of the case but it principally concerned the royalties on the songs published separately from the score. I know that Wray lost

the case and that it cost him thousands of pounds.

He went on the continent and married a wealthy Hungarian widow, and we all believed that England had seen the last of him. But as though not to be outdone in this, Vallery also married. His marriage was about as disastrous an affair as ever disgraced the records of a divorce court. It lasted eighteen months, and when Mrs. Vallery was eventually persuaded to appeal to the courts she had a most pitiable story to disclose. Not only had she no difficulty in proving Vallery's guilt of faithlessness, but she recorded a distressing series of cruelties. He had struck her on innumerable occasions. He had thrashed her with a belt, locked her in a cupboard, thrown her out into the garden on a wet night, and many times threatened her with a revolver.

A few months after the divorce, news came that Wray's wife had died suddenly under rather mysterious circumstances, in Buda-Pesth. He returned to London, and three years after this law case Wray and Vallery were again at work together on a play which was called, "Wine, Woman, and Mr. Binns." It was one of the most amusing, most lyrical plays seen in London for a decade, and ran for four hundred and fifty odd nights. The Wray-Vallery combination then seemed to make a most surprising spurt. They both settled down and worked hard. Wray's experience in Hungary, whatever it had been, quieted him. He became less eccentric, less depraved, in his appetites. On the other hand, he was rapidly be-

coming more self-centred, shrewd, and commercial. He appeared to be obsessed with the idea of making a huge fortune. Vallery was also not without ambitions in this direction. And between them they undoubtedly succeeded in grinding the commercial axe to good purpose.

There is no question but that the series of plays that they composed during this latter phase were artistically inferior to the earlier ones, but on the other hand their sureness of touch was more apparent. To use a hackneyed phrase they knew just what the public wanted and how to give it to them.

At that time Timothy and I had quite lost touch with them. Timothy was the proud father of three girls. He had written several successful novels and stories, and was a reader to an eminent firm of publishers. I myself had a son and daughter and an increasing practice. We met frequently and indulged in little social distractions, but we felt no great desire to seek further the companionship of these two notorieties.

“They’re getting a bit too thick,” was Timothy’s comment after reading the details of Vallery’s divorce. Nevertheless we still followed their careers with considerable interest, and there often came to us stories of their violent differences, of scenes at rehearsals, ugly threats, and recriminations. On one occasion Wray wanted to have the whole of their interests put in the hands of a well-known agent, but Vallery objected. The dispute went on for months

and as usual Vallery had his way. It is said that they wrote "The Girl at Sea" when they were not on speaking terms, and all the score and libretto were passed backward and forward through a lawyer. Still they went on from success to success. Together they wrote some twenty odd variably successful plays. In one new year's honour list we found the name of James Wray, the eminent composer, under the knighthoods. The forces which control the distribution of honours are as mysterious as the forces which control the stars, and rather more inexplicable. How Sir James Wray managed to obtain his title over the heads of many distinguished artists it is impossible to say. These things are usually accepted with a smile and a shrug, and a man's rivals are not often perturbed by them.

But in the case of Vallery the affair reacted disastrously. He was furious. He took the whole thing as a royal affront to himself. If Sir James Wray why not Sir Francis Vallery? It is said that the powers that be have a prejudice against people who have shown up badly in the divorce court. This was true, but on the other hand was Wray's private life above reproach?

His colleague's title broke Vallery up, and it certainly did no good to Wray. They were both now prematurely old men, worn out, and embittered. They never wrote another play together.

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Nestling in a hollow among the gentler slopes of the Pyrenees is a little village called Cambo-les-Bains. No harsh winds ever come to Cambo. Even in the few months of winter the air is soft and tender. In February the hedges are aglow with primroses and violets. In March rhododendrons and magnolias raise their insolent heads. Thither Rostand, the famous French poet, laid out a dreamy garden on the proceeds of the success which was to come to "Chanticleer." Alas, poor Chanticleer! Some things survive more readily in a sturdier clime. Thither come people whose lungs are not quite the thing—"just for a month or two, old boy." And they lie there in camp beds out in the open under the trees . . . waiting. It is a good place to die.

Thither one day came Francis Vallery, old and broken in health. He took the ground floor of the Miramar Hotel, with his own valet, and cook and secretary. And thither one day—strangely enough—came Sir James Wray. It seems curious that after a life's enmity they should have been drawn together in the end. It was Vallery who invited Wray. It appears to me less remarkable that Vallery should have invited Wray, than that Wray should have accepted. Vallery was completely friendless. The vicious associations of his youth were snapped. People of interest had deserted him. Friends had betrayed him. Wray—no, Wray was not his friend, but in any case they had worked together. They knew each other's frailties. There

were a thousand things they could talk about, discuss . . . memories. Ah! perhaps the old inspiration might once more spring forth—just one more play. It was seven years now since the curtain had rung down on “The Picador.”

But why did Wray go to Cambo? He had friends of a sort, society people, artists. He was still a figure at dinner parties, first nights. *His* lungs were still all right. His hatred of Vallery was not assuaged. Perhaps he went because he feared him. All through their association he had been under the spell of the stronger party. At every great crisis he knew he had given way. Vallery had him under his thumb from the first. Wray had sworn never to write again, “not a phrase, not a bar.” And yet one day he took the train from Biarritz and drove up to the little village in the hills, and there he stayed for seven months.

For the account of the tragic *dénouement* of this visit Timothy and I are indebted to an American gentleman named Scobie. Scobie had been to Cambo to visit his sister, who was herself suffering from pulmonary trouble.

On his way back through London he had dined at Timothy’s one evening at Chelsea, and I was the only other guest. Mr. Scobie was a lean-faced New Englander, with small keen gray eyes beneath shaggy brows. He had long thin hands, the first fingers of which he had the habit of shaking at us alternately as he spoke. He was not anxious to talk about the

Wray-Vallery affair. He said he would rather forget all about it, but as Timothy had inveigled him there with the express purpose of pumping in the matter, we were cruel enough to insist. Mr. Scobie had certainly had enough of it. He had had to give evidence in a French court through an interpreter, and he had no great opinion either of French courts, their dilatory methods, or their sanitary arrangements. You see, he was the sole witness of the actual tragedy.

It appeared that his sister's suite of rooms was in the Hotel Miramar annex. From her balcony he had a complete view of the South Veranda, where Vallery spent most of the day. He had spoken to Vallery once or twice, but finding that he was a "bear with a sore neck" he desisted and devoted his attention to other hotel guests.

Then he explained: "The other old boy with the squeaky voice turned up."

"Sir James Wray?"

"Sure. I didn't take much stock of him at first, I used to hear him piping away below, and the other occasionally barking back an answer which I couldn't hear.

"But at last that voice began to get on my nerves. You see I could hear just what he said, but I couldn't hear the reply. It was like listening to a man on the 'phone. My! it was a voice. I was almost on the point of wanting to call out to him to quit. But you know how it is. If you listen to anyone you kind

of can't help wanting to hear what they are going to say next."

"What sort of things did he talk about?"

"Most every kind of dither, like old men will—the colour of a girl's frock in some show put across when he was a young man; the best place to buy over-shoes; the retail price of whisky. He was a pretty good hand at whisky, too. He arrived with two cases. The other man sat watching him. I didn't like them. I tried to get my sister moved, but the hotel was full. I was away in Paris during the fall and didn't return for some months. I got back to Cambo three days before—the thing happened."

I don't think Mrs. Timothy took the interest in this incident that we did. In any case she made some excuse about packing up Christmas presents for the children, and left the room.

Mr. Scobie, Timothy and I, drew our chairs up round the fire.

"How did you find things when you got back, Mr. Scobie?"

"Identically the same, sir. There were those two old boys still on the veranda below, sitting some way apart, squeaky voice with the whisky bottle in front of him letting on about the difference between merino and linsey-woolsey, or the rise in home rails, or the name of the girl who used to sell programmes at some God-forsaken theatre. There was the other man, kind of vague in the background, growling 'yes' and 'no' or be damned if he knew or cared. It



was November and the weather was heavy and overcast for those parts. It's a dandy place, except for the sick people."

"What happened on the actual day?"

"It all grew out of the same thing, if you'll believe me. It was early in the afternoon. I'd been out for a stroll. When I got to my sister's room, I heard squeaky voice going strong. The other man was asking him where some place was hard by. Yes, sir, I recollect exactly now how the thing came through. Squeaky voice said: 'You remember the villa next to Madam Ponsolle's Epicerie establishment. There's a flower-pot in the window about the size of a stone ginger-beer bottle—well, it's just opposite.' This seemed to satisfy the big man, and except that he growled: 'Oh, it's there, is it?' Then he added rather savagely: 'I know the place you mean. I noticed the flower-pot myself but it's a good three times the size of a stone ginger-beer bottle.'

"Then, believe me, the trouble began. It beats me why the argument got them like that. Squeaky voice began to scream that he had taken particular note of the flower-pot at the time, and he'd swear it wasn't an inch higher than an ordinary stone ginger-beer bottle. And each time he said that the bear got angrier and growled: 'It's three times the size.' The argument raged for an hour. Squeaky voice pointed out that the other was every kind of wall-eyed, bone-headed thruster, and the bear rolled about the veranda shaking his fist and using language that

would have made a Milwaukee bartender hand in his checks. The exhibition tired me and I went in.

“I think they slackened up, too, after a bit. Somewhere away in the big rooms a meal was cooked. The night came on quick and the moon broke through the clouds. After dinner I’m darned if I didn’t hear them going it again hammer and tongs. ‘I’m a judge of size,’ Squeaky was saying. ‘There isn’t an inch to it.’ ‘It’s damn nearly four times the size,’ roared the other, who you see had raised his figures. I was near to getting the hotel management on to quelling the disturbance, but it slackened off. At least, I thought it had. About ten o’clock I went to my room, which was right at the corner. I went on to the balcony to take a last breather, and then I saw the whole darn thing happen——”

“Have a little whisky, Mr. Scobie,” said Timothy.

“I will, sir, thank you. It seemed dead still. I thought they had gone in. But suddenly I saw Wray—that’s the man’s name, sure, Wray—he was crouching in the corner of the veranda just beneath me, and he had a bottle in his hand. I thought at first it was a last carouse, then by the light of the moon I noticed he was holding it by the neck and the bottle was empty. His thin voice came up to me like a husky wail: ‘Blast you, it is just the exact size.’ I could just see the shadowy form of the other man lying back near the window at the end. He was mumbling: ‘Five times as big!’

“Wray went toward him like a cat. I called out, and I think the effect of my cry was to get the big man alert to trouble. He was on his legs by the time Wray reached him. I saw the bottle swing in the air. Then they came to grips. Gosh! I’ve seen men fight, but—tables and chairs and glasses were scattered and broken. I heard the bottle break, but one of them was still holding it by the neck. Up and down the veranda they rolled and fought and bit. Just like madmen. Then there was a scream. A man and a woman rushed out. I went below. The big man Vallery was lying in a heap—dead—his throat cut from ear to ear. Wray was writhing by his side. He died the next morning: he died blaspheming. Like a gump I gave out that I’d seen the whole thing and they nailed me for the inquest. Those French courts of justice—ugh! I wanted to forget the whole blamed thing—wipe it out of my memory. But there I was nailed, made to go over and over it again. I never thought it possible to see such scarlet hate and passion—just savage beasts they were—and all over the size of a flower-pot.”

“Thank you, Mr. Rallish, just a finger.”

The fire glowed in the warm security of the little room and snow was drifting against the windows. In the drawing-room across the passage Mrs. Timothy was running her hands over the keys of a piano. Timothy smiled wistfully.

“Neither Wray nor Vallery ever liked me,” he

remarked apparently irrelevantly. Then by way of explanation: "I'm going to have my revenge upon them. It isn't often that a writer of fiction has things like that left at his door——"

Mr. Scobie nodded, and shook his long first finger at him.

"I see your point, sir. Provided you leave me out, the goods are yours. Here's another small side issue might be useful to you. It wasn't a flower-pot at all. I verified the fact the next day. It was a child's red stockinette cap. Just think of it. They only had to stroll ten minutes up the village street. They could have taken a ruler, bet each other drinks, laughed the thing off. 'Stead of that they thought it more amusing to fight with broken whisky bottles. What do you think of it?"

We sat there staring at the fire. Timothy was sucking at an empty pipe.

"I can see the explanation," he said at last.

"I should be entertained to hear it, sir."

"You see," said Timothy slowly, "the angel of accomplishment had deserted them."

## THE MATCH

IT IS all so incredibly long ago that you must not ask me to remember the scores. In fact, even of the result I am a little dubious. I only know that it was just on such a day as this that we were all mooning round Bunty Cartwright's garden after breakfast, smoking, and watching the great bumblebees hanging heavily on the flowers. Along the flagged pathway to the house were standard rose-trees, the blossoms and perfume of which excited one pleasantly. It was jolly to be in flannels and to feel the sun on one's skin, for the day promised to be hot.

For years it had been a tradition for dear old Bunty to ask us all down for the week. There were usually eight or nine of us, and we made up our team with the doctor and his son and one or two other odds and ends of chaps in the neighbourhood. I know that on this day he had secured the services of Dawkin, a very fast bowler from a town near by, for Celminster, the team we were to play, were reputed to be a very hot lot.

As we stood there laughing and talking, Bunty and Tony Peebles were sitting within the stone porch, I remember, trying to finish a game of chess started the previous evening; there was the crunch of wheels

on the road, and the brake arrived, accompanied by the doctor's son, a thin slip of a boy on a bicycle.

Then there was the usual bustle of putting up cricket-bags and going back for things one had forgotten, and the inevitable "chipping" of "Togs," a boy whose real name I have forgotten, but who was always last in everything, even in the order of going in. It must have been fully half an hour before we made a start, and then the doctor hadn't arrived. However, he came up at the last minute, his jolly red face beaming and perspiring. Some of the chaps cycled, and soon left us behind, but I think we were seven on the brake. It was good to be high up and to feel the wind blowing gently on our faces from the sea. We passed villages of amazing beauty nestling in the hollows of the downs, and rumbled on our way to the accompaniment of lowing sheep and the doctor's rich, burring voice talking of cricket, and the song of the lark overhead that sang in praise of this day of festival.

It was good to laugh and talk and watch the white road stretching far ahead, then dipping behind a stretch of woodland. It was good to feel the thrill of excited anticipation as we approached the outskirts of Celminster. What sort of ground would it be? What were their bowlers like? Who would come off for us?

It was good to see the grinning, friendly faces of the villagers and then to descend from the brake, to nod to our opponents in that curiously self-conscious way

we have as a race, and then eagerly to survey the field. And is there in the whole of England a more beautiful place than the Celminster cricket ground?

On one side is a clump of buildings dominated by the straggling yards and outhouses belonging to the "Bull" inn. On the farther side is a fence, and just beyond a stream bordered by young willows. At right angles to the inn is a thick cluster of elms—a small wood, in fact—while on the fourth side a low, gray stone wall separates the field from the road. Across the road may be seen the spire of a church, the fabric hidden by the trees, and away beyond sweeping contours of the downs.

In the corner of the field is a rough pavilion faced with half-timber, and a white flagstaff with the colours of the Celminster Cricket Club fluttering at its summit.

Members of the Celminster Club were practising in little knots about the field, and a crowd of small boys were sitting on a long wooden bench, shouting indescribably, and some were playing mock games with sticks and rubber balls. A few aged inhabitants looked at us with lazy interest and touched their hats.

A little man with a square chin and an auburn moustache came out and grinned at us and asked for Mr. Cartwright. We discovered that he was the local wheelwright and the Celminster captain. He showed us our room in the pavilion and called Bunty "sir." Of course, Bunty lost the toss. He

always did during that week, and this led to considerably more "chipping," and we turned out to field.

No one who has never experienced it can ever appreciate the tense joy of a cricketer when he comes out to begin a match. The gaiety of the morning, when the light is at its best and all one's senses are alert; the sense of being among splendid deeds that are yet unborn; and then the jolly red ball! How we love to clutch it with a sort of romantic exultation and toss it to one another! For it is upon *it* that the story of the day will turn. It is the scarlet symbol of our well-ordered adventure, as yet untouched and virginal, and yet strangely pregnant of unaccomplished actions. What story will it have to tell when the day is done? Who will drop catches with it? Who destroy its virgin loveliness with a fearful drive against the stone wall?

As I have stated, it happened all so long ago that I cannot clearly remember many of the details of that match, but curiously enough I remember the first over that Dawkin sent down very vividly.

A very tall man came in to bat. The first ball he played straight back to the bowler; the second was a "yorker" and just missed his wicket; the third he drove hard to mid-off and Bunty stopped it; the fourth he stopped with his pads; the fifth he played back to the bowler again; and the sixth knocked his leg clean out of the ground.

One wicket for no runs! We flung the scarlet symbol backward and forward in a great state of



excitement, with visions of a freak match, the whole side of our opponents being out for ten runs, and so on. I remember the glum face of their umpire, a genial corn merchant, dressed in a white coat and a bowler hat, with a bewildering number of sweaters tied round his neck, glancing apprehensively at the pavilion. I remember that the next man in was the little wheelwright, and he looked very solemn and tense. The first three balls missed his wicket by inches, then he stopped them. My recollection of the rest of that morning was a vision of the little wheelwright, with his chin thrust forward, frowning at the bowlers. He had a peculiarly uncomfortable stance at the wicket, but he played very straight. He kept Dawkin out for about five overs, then he started pulling him round to leg. The wicket was rather fiery, and Dawkin was very fast. The wheelwright was hit three times on the thigh, twice on the chest, and numberless times on the arms, and one ball got up and glanced off his scalp, but he did not waver. He plodded on, lying in wait for the short ball to hook to leg. I do not remember how many he made, but it was a great innings. He took the heart out of Dawkin and encouraged one or two of the others to hit with courage. He was caught at last by a brilliant catch by Arthur Booth running in from long leg.

One advantage of a village team like Celminster is that they have no "tail," or, rather, that you never know what the tail will do. You know by the cos-

tume that they have a tail, for the first four or five batsmen appear in complete outfits of white flannels and sweaters, and then the costumes start varying in a wonderful degree. Number six appears in a black waistcoat with white flannel trousers, number seven with brown pads and black boots, number eight with a blue shirt and brown trousers, and so on to the last man, who is dressed uncommonly like a verger. But this rallentando of sartorial equipment does not in any way represent the run-getting ability of the team, for suddenly some gentleman inappropriately garbed, who gives the impression of never having had a bat in his hand before, will lash out and score twenty-five runs off one over.

On this particular occasion I remember one man who came in about ninth, and who wore one brown pad and sand-shoes, and had on a blue shirt with a dicky and a collar, but no tie, and who stood right in front of his wicket, looked grimly at Dawkin, and then hit him for two sixes, a four, and a five, to the roaring accompaniment of "Good old Jar-r-ge!" from a row of small boys near the pavilion. The fifth ball hit his pad and he was given out l.b.w. He gave no expression of surprise, disappointment or disgust, but just walked grimly back to the pavilion. Celminster were all out before lunch, but I cannot let the last man—the verger—retire (he was bowled first ball off his foot) before speaking of our wicket-keeper, Jimmy Guilsworth.

Jimmy Guilsworth was, in my opinion, an ideal

wicket-keeper. He was a little chap and wore glasses, but his figure was solid and homely. He was by profession something of a poet, and wrote lyrics in the celtic-twilight manner. He played cricket rarely, but when he did, he was instinctively made wicket-keeper. He had that curious, sympathetic mothering quality which every good wicket-keeper should have. The first business of a wicket-keeper is to make the opposing batsmen feel at home. When the man comes in trembling and nervous, the wicket-keeper should make some reassuring remark, something that at once establishes a bond of understanding between honourable opponents. When the batsman is struck on the elbow it is the wicket-keeper who should rush up and administer first-aid or spiritual comfort. And when the batsman is bowled or caught, he should say: "Hard luck, sir!"

At the same time it his business to mother the bowlers on his own side. He must be continually encouraging them and sympathizing with them, but in a subdued voice, so that the batsman does not hear. And, moreover, he must be prepared to act as chief of staff to the captain. He must advise him on the change of bowlers and on the disposition of the field. All of this requires great tact, understanding and perspicacity.

All these qualities Jimmy Guilsworth had in a marked degree. If he sometimes dropped catches and never stood near enough to stump any one, what

was that to the sympathetic way he said "Oh, hard luck, sir!" to an opposing batsman when he was bowled by a long hop, or the convincing way he would call out, "Oh, well hit, sir!" when another opponent pulled a half-volley for four. What could have been more encouraging than the way he would rest his hand on young Booth's shoulder after he had bowled a disappointing over, and say: "I say, old chap, you're in great form. Could you pitch 'em up just a wee bit?" When things were going badly for the side, Jimmy would grin and whisper into Cartwright's ear. Then there would be a consultation and a change of bowlers, or some one would come closer up to third-man, and, lo! in no time something would happen.

But it is lunch-time. In the pavilion a long table is set, with a clean cloth and napkins and with gay bowls of salad. On a side-table is a wonderful array of cold joints, hams, cold lamb, and pies. We sit down, talking of the game. Curiously enough, we do not mix with our opponents. We sit at one end, and they occupy the other, but we grin at one another, and the men sitting at the point of contact of the two parties occasionally proffer a remark.

Girls wait on us, and a fat man in shirt-sleeves, who produces ale and ginger-beer from some mysterious corner. And what a lunch it is! Does ever veal-and-ham pie taste so good as it does in the pavilion after the morning chasing a ball? And then tarts and fruit and custard and a large yellow cheese, how

splendid it all seems, with the buzz of conversation and the bright sun through the open door! Does anything lend a fuller flavour to the inevitable pipe than such a lunch, mellowed by the rough flavour of a pint of shandy-gaff?

We stroll out again into the sun and puff tranquilly, and some of us gather round old Bob Parsons, the corn merchant, and listen to his panegyric of cricket as played "in the old days." He's seen a lot of cricket in his time, old Bob. His bony, weather-beaten face wrinkles, and his clear, ingenuous eyes blink at the heavens as he recalls famous men: "Johnny Strutt, he was a good 'un. Aye, and ye should ha' seen old Tom Kennett bowl in his time. Nine wicket' he took against Kailhurst, hittin' the wood every toime. Fast he were, faster'n they bowl now. Fower bahls he bahl fast, then put up a slow."

He shakes his head meditatively, as though the contemplation of the diabolical cunning of bowling a slow ball after four fast ones was almost too much to believe, as though it was a demonstration of intellectual calisthenics that this generation could not appreciate.

It is now the turn of the opponents to take the field, while we eagerly scan the score-sheet to see the order of going in, and restlessly move about the pavilion, trying on pads, and making efforts not to appear nervous.

And with what a tense emotion we watch our first two men open the innings! It is with a gasp of relief

we see Jimmy Guilsworth cut a fast ball for two, and know, at any rate, we have made a more fortunate start than our opponents did.

I do not remember how many runs we made that afternoon, though as we were out about tea time, I believe we just passed the Celminster total, but I remember that to our joy Bunty Cartwright came off. He had been unlucky all the week, but this was his joy-day. He seemed cheerful and confident when he went in, and he was let off on the boundary off the first ball! After that he did not make a mistake.

It was a joy to watch Bunty bat. He was tall and graceful, and he sprang to meet the ball like a wave scudding against a rock. He seemed to epitomize the dancing sunlight, a thing of joy expressing the fullness of the crowded hour. His hair blew over his face, and one could catch the gleam of satisfaction that radiated from him as he panted on his bat after running out a five.

He was not a great cricketer, none of us were, but he had a good eye, the heart of a lion, and he loved the game.

I believe I made eight or nine. I know I made a cut for four. The recollection of it is very keen to this day, and the satisfying joy of seeing the ball scudding along the ground a yard out of the reach of point. It made me very happy. And then one of those balls came along that one knows nothing about. How remarkable it is that a bowler who appears so harmless from the pavilion seems terrify-

ing and demoniacal when he comes tearing down the crease toward you!

Yes, I'm sure we passed the Celminster total now, for I remember at tea time discussing the possibilities of winning by a single innings if we got Celminster out for forty.

After tea, for some reason or other, one smokes cigarettes. We strolled into a yard at the back of the "Bull" inn, and there was a wicket gate leading to a lawn where some wonderful old men, whose language was almost incomprehensible, were drinking ale and playing bowls. At the side were some tall sunflowers growing amid piles of manure.

Some one in the pavilion rang a bell, and we languidly returned to take the field once more.

I remember that it was late in the afternoon that a strange thing happened to me. I was fielding out in the long field not thirty yards from the stream. Tony Peebles was bowling from the end where I was fielding. I noted his ambling run up to the wicket and the graceful action of his arm as he swung the ball across. A little incident happened, a thing trivial at the time, but which one afterward remembers. The batsman hit a ball rather low on the off side, which the doctor's son caught or stopped on the ground. There was an appeal for a catch, given in the batsman's favour, but for some reason or other he thought the umpire had said "out," and he started walking to the pavilion. He was at least two yards out of his crease when the doctor's son

threw the ball to Jimmy Guilsworth at the wicket. Jimmy had the wicket at his mercy, but instead of putting it down he threw it back to the bowler. It was perhaps a trivial thing, but it epitomized the game we played. One does not take advantage of a mistake. It isn't done.

The sun was already beginning to flood the valley with the excess of amber light which usually betokens his parting embrace. The stretch of level grass became alive and vibrant, tremblingly golden against the long, crisp shadows cast from the elms. The elms themselves nodded contentedly, and down by the stream flickered little white patches of children's frocks. Everything suddenly seemed to become more vivid and transcendent. As if aware of the splendour of that moment, all the little things struggled to express themselves more actively. The birds and little insects in solemn unison praised God, or, rather, to my mind, at that moment they praised England, the land that gave them such a glorious setting. The white-clad figures on the sunlit field, the smoke from the old buildings by the inn trailing lazily skyward, the comfortable buzz of the voices of some villagers lying on their stomachs on the grass. Ah! My dear land!

I don't know how it was, but at that moment I felt a curious contraction of the heart, like one who looks into the face of a lover who is going on a journey. Perhaps a townsman gets a little tired at the end of a day in the field, or the feeling may have



been due to the Cassandra-like dirge of a flock of rooks that swung across the sky and settled in the elms.

The bat, cut from a willow down by the stream, the stumps, the leather ball, the symbol of the wicket, the level lawn, cut and rolled and true—all these things were redolent of the land we moved on. They spoke of the love of trees and wind and sun and the equipoise of man in Nature's setting. They symbolized our race, slow-moving and serene, with a certain sensuous joy in movement, a love of straightness, and an indestructible faith in custom. Ah, that the beauty of that hour should fade, that the splendour and serenity of it all should pass away! Strange waves of misgiving flooded me.

If it should be all *too* slow-moving, *too* serene! If at that moment the wheels of the Juggernaut of evolution were already on their way to crush the splendour of it beneath their weight!

Ah! my dear land, if you should be in danger! If one day another match should come in which you would measure yourself against—some unknown terrors! I was aware at that moment of a poignant sense of prayer that when your trial should come it would find you worthy of the clean sanity of that sunlit field; and if in the end you should go down, as everything in nature *does* go down before the scythe of Time, the rooks up there in the elm should cry aloud your epitaph. They are very old and wise, these rooks: they watched the last of the Ptolemys

pass from Egypt, they moaned above Carthage and Troy, and warned the Roman prætors of the coming of Attila. And the epitaph they shall make for you—for *they* saw the little incident of Jimmy Guilsworth and the doctor's son—shall be: "Whatever you may say of these people, they played the game."

I think those small boys down by the pavilion made too much fuss about the catch I muffed. Of course, I did get both hands to it, and as a matter of fact the sun was *not* in my eyes; but I think I started a bit late, and it seemed to be screwing horribly. Ironical jeers are not comforting. Bunty, like the dear good sportsman he is, merely called out:

"Dreaming there?"

But it was a wretched moment. I remember slinking across at the over, feeling like an animal that has contracted a disease and is ashamed to be seen, and my mental condition was by no means improved by the cheap sarcasms of young Booth or Eric Ganton. We did not get Celminster out for the second time, and the certainty that the result would not be affected by the second innings led to introduction of strange and unlikely bowlers being put on and given their chance.

I remember that just at the end of the day even young "Togs" was tired. He sent down three most extraordinary balls that went nowhere within reach of the batsman, the fourth was a full pitch, and a young rustic giant who was then batting, promptly hit it right over the pavilion. The next ball was

very short and came on the leg side. I was fielding at short leg and I saw the batsman hunching his shoulders for a fearful swipe. I felt in a horrible funk. I heard the loud crack of the ball on the willow, and I was aware of it coming straight at my head. I fell back in an ineffectual sort of manner, and despairingly threw up my hands in a sort of self defence. And then an amazing thing happened: the ball went bang into my left hand and stopped there. I slipped and fell, but somehow I managed to hang on to the ball. I remember hearing a loud shout, and suddenly the pain of impact vanished in the realization that I had brought off a hot catch.

It was a golden moment. The match was over. I remember all our chaps shouting and laughing, and young "Togs" rushing up and throwing his arms round me in a mock embrace. We ambled back to the pavilion and it suddenly struck me how good looking most of our men were, even Tony Peebles, whom I had always looked upon as the plainest of the plain. My heart warmed toward Bunty with a passionate zeal when he struck me on the back and said: "Good man! You've more than retrieved your muff in the long field."

I know they ragged me frightfully in the pavilion when we were changing, but it was no effort to take it good-humouredly. I felt ridiculously proud.

We took a long time getting away, there was so much rubbing down and talking to be done, and then there was the difficulty of getting Len Booth out of

the "Bull" inn. He had a romantic passion for drinking ale with yokels, and a boy had stuck a pin into one of Ganton's tires, and he had to find a bicycle shop and get it mended. It was getting dark when we all got established once more in the brake.

I remember vividly turning the corner in the High Street and looking back on the solemn profile of the inn. The sky was almost colourless, just a glow of warmth, and already in some of the windows lamps were appearing. We huddled together contentedly in the brake, and I saw the firm lines of Bunty's face as he leaned over a match lighting his pipe.

The grass is long to-day in the field where we played Celminster, and down by the stream are two square, unattractive buildings, covered with zinc roofing, where is heard the dull roar of machinery. The ravages of time cannot eradicate from my memory the vision of Bunty's face leaning over his pipe, or the pleasant buzz of the village voices as we clattered among them in the High Street, or the sight of the old corn merchant's face as he came up and spoke to Bunty (Bunty had stopped the brake to get more tobacco) and touched his hat and said:

"Good noight, sir. Good luck to 'ee!"

Decades have passed, and I have to press the spring of my memory to bring these things back; but when they come they are very dear to me.

I know that in the wind that blows above Gallipoli you will find the whispers of the great faith that

Bunty died for. Eric Ganton, young Booth, and Jimmy Guilsworth, where are they? In vain the soil of Flanders strives to clog the free spirit of my friends.

“Good noight, sir. Good luck to 'ee!”

Again I see the old man's face as I gaze across the field where the long grass grows, and I see the red ball tossed hither and thither, with its story still unfinished, and I hear the sound of Jimmy's voice:

“Oh, well hit, sir!” as he encourages an opponent.

The times have changed since then, but you cannot destroy these things. Manners have changed, customs have changed, even the faces of men have changed; and yet this calendar on my knee is trying to tell me that it all happened *two years ago to-day!*

And overhead the garrulous rooks seem strangely flustered.

## MRS. BEELBROW'S LIONS

**M**RS. POULTENEY-BEELBROW is the kind of woman who drips with refinement. Everything else has been squeezed out of her. Even her hair, which once was red, has been dried to a rusty gray. Her narrow face is pinched and bloodless; the lines of her figure blurred by shapeless and colourless materials, as though she resented any suggestion of organic functioning, as though blood itself were not quite "nice." The voice is high pitched, toneless, ice-cold. She speaks with dead monotony, without enthusiasm. And yet one can hardly describe Mrs. Beelbrow as a woman who has not had enthusiasms. Lions!—lions have been the determining passion of Mrs. Beelbrow's life. A life amidst lions can hardly be called an apathetic life, you might say.

I would like to have known Mrs. Beelbrow when she was quite young, although the condition is difficult to visualize. She is now—that quite indeterminate age which æsthetic women sometimes arrive at too soon and forsake too early. She might easily be in the early thirties; on the other hand she might be in the late forties; even later, even earlier—she is *so* refined, you see. You can imagine

her doing nothing so vulgar as visiting the Royal Academy or reading a popular magazine. As for the cinema, or a revue—oh, my dear!

It is only her eyes which sometimes give you an inkling of a restless soul. They are almost green with a tiny gray pupil. She sometimes smiles with her lips, but never with her eyes, which are always roaming—searching—lions.

She was a Miss Poulteney (you know, the Hull shipping people), and she married Beelbrow the stockbroker. God knows why! You can seldom find Beelbrow. Sometimes you may observe him standing against the wall at one of those overpowering receptions she gives. He is tubby, genial and negative. He smiles at his wife—busily occupied with lions—and mutters:

“Wonderful woman, my wife—wonderful! um-m.”

And then he retires to the refreshment-room and waits on people.

Everyone will tell you that Mrs. Beelbrow was once a remarkably talented violinist, though we have never met any one who has heard her play. She certainly knows something about music, and can talk shiveringly about every ancient and modern composer of note, in addition to many composers without note. But do not imagine that her discriminations are confined to music. She shivers about architecture, sculpture, painting, and literature. She dissects tone-poems, eulogizes discords, subdivides

futurism into seven distinct planes, considers Synge too sensational, professes a pallid admiration for Bach when performed in an empty church, is coldly contemptuous of the Renaissance, dislikes Dickens, Scott, Zola and Tolstoi (in spite of the latter being a Russian and a lion). By the way, everything Russian exercises a curious influence over her—Russian and Chinese. Things Japanese she condemns as *bourgeois*. She is enormously refined, a sybarite of æsthetic values. She has no children, but she keeps a marmoset, a Borzoi, five chows, two smoke-gray Persian cats, a parakeet, and some baby crocodiles in a sunk tank in the conservatory. The latter she keeps because they remind her of the slow movement of some sonata by Sibelius.

But it is of the lions she keeps that we would speak. They are not real lions, of course. Real lions are peculiarly commonplace—reminiscent of Landseer and the Zoölogical Gardens. Mrs. Beelbrow's lions roar in drawing-rooms and concert halls. They are mostly indigenous to the soil of Central or Eastern Europe. She imports them from Russia, Bohemia, Hungary, Austria, or Tcheko-Slovakia. No other breeds are any good. Neither must they be popular in the generally accepted sense. If you say to Mrs. Beelbrow: "I heard Kreisler play the Bach *chaconne* very finely last night," she shivers and says: "Ah! but have you heard De Borch play the slow movement of the Sczhklski sonata?"

You weakly reply "No." The name of De Borch



seems familiar, but you had never heard of him as a violinist.

She leans backward and regards you through half-closed eyes. Upon her face there creeps an expression of genuine sympathy. There is an almost imperceptible shrug of the shoulders, and she turns away. You mutter "Damn!" and also repair to the refreshment-room, where Mr. Beelbrow waits on you. (The refreshments are very good.) He says:

"Have you seen my wife? She's a wonderful woman—wonderful—um-m!"

We should mention that this "um-m" of Mr. Beelbrow is a curious kind of low hum that he affixes at the end of every statement. It seems to deliberately contradict just what he has said. It is like a genteel "I don't think!"

It is said that in the old days Mrs. Beelbrow used to make a hobby of genuine lions, famous opera singers and painters. There is a full length of her by Sarjeant in the billiard-room; a very good portrait, too, if somewhat merciless. It is characteristic of her that it should now be in the billiard-room—a room that is only used on the night of a great crush to deposit hats and coats that are crowded out of the cloak-room. Sarjeant is *passee*. If you mention the portrait to her, she says:

"Ah! but have you seen the pastel of me by Splitz?"

The pastel by Splitz is in the place of honour in the drawing-room. You suspect that it is meant to be

a woman by the puce-coloured drapery and what appears to be long hair—or is it a waterfall in the background? She says of it:

“It is wonderful! Splitz got into it the expression of all that I have yearned for and never achieved. You can feel the wave-lengths of my thoughts vibrating esoterically.”

(Good luck to Splitz! I hope he got his cheque.)

The day came when Mrs. Beelbrow tired of genuine lions.

They were a little disillusioning, too business-like, and too fond of being waited on by Mr. Beelbrow in the refreshment-room. And so she said:

“I will make my own lions.”

She travelled abroad, taking with her the marmoset, two of the chows, one smoke-gray Persian cat, the parakeet, the crocodiles in a special tank, and Mr. Beelbrow. It was in Budapest that she discovered her first embryo lion. His name was *Skrâtch*. She heard him playing the fiddle in an obscure café. She went to hear him three nights running. On the third night she went up to him after the performance, and she said:

“Come with me. I will make you a lion.”

Now we are anxious to deal fairly by *Skrâtch*. He was young, talented, poor and hungry. He had the normal ambitions, desires, appetites, and the weaknesses of the normal young man. He had often dreamed of being a lion, and after one or two beers he frequently persuaded himself that the accomplish-

ment was not impossible. Nevertheless, he had never been blind to its difficulties. And here was a woman who came to him and said, quite simply: "I will make you a lion," in the same way that she might have said, "I will cut you a liver-sausage sandwich."

How could you expect *Skrâtch* to take it?

When he arrived in London he impressed us as being quite a pleasant, amiable young man. He had a thin body, but rather puffy, sallow cheeks, jet black hair, and brown eyes. He was obviously at first a little apprehensive, suspicious. The eyes seemed to say:

"Oh, well, anyway they can't eat me."

He lived at Mrs. Beelbrow's and had what she called finishing lessons with a Polish professor. It was exactly a year before *Skrâtch* was launched into lionhood. During that time no one heard him play a note. And yet a most remarkable thing happened in connection with the launching. Months before *Skrâtch* appeared in public the newspapers were always containing paragraphs about "a remarkable young violinist shortly expected from Budapest. Said to be a second *Ysaye*." Mrs. Beelbrow's drawing-room was always crowded, but *Skrâtch* never played. He was introduced to all kinds of people, and whispered about. I remember meeting there the critics of the—no, perhaps this kind of revelation is not quite fair. Anyway, when *Skrâtch* gave his first orchestral concert at the Queen's Hall the affair had been so cleverly prepared that the

place was packed. The Press reviews, when not eulogistic, were for the most part non-committal. Dogs are afraid to bark at a lion. It would be a terrible blunder to condemn a real lion. One must wait and see what the general verdict is.

There is no denying also that Skratch did play very well. He was what is known as a talented violinist. One may assert without fear of contradiction that there were at that time in London probably thirty or forty violinists (leaving out, of course, the few supreme artists) equally as talented as Skratch. But they had not the *flair* of lions. They just went on with their job, playing when an opportunity occurred but for the most part teaching.

The following day an advertisement appeared in the papers announcing that "owing to the colossal success of Herr Skratch's concert, three more would follow on such-and-such dates." (The advertisement must have been sent in before the colossally successful concert took place.) From that day forward Skratch did indeed become a qualified lion. The more responsible papers certainly began to damn him with faint praise, and even to pull him to pieces. But if you assert a thing frequently enough, insistently enough, and in large enough type, people will come to accept it. He became a kind of papier-mâché lion, and it didn't do the boy any good. For two years the hoardings and the newspapers reeked with advertisements and notices about the "great violinist Skratch."

And then he began to develop in other ways. From a slim, nervous boy he rapidly became a robustious, self-assured, florid man. His body filled out, his cheeks reddened, his hair grew unmanageable. He adopted an eccentric mode of dress. And Mrs. Beelbrow? The affair reacted upon her just as one might expect. She became more precious, more aloof, more impossible. She floated round the drawing-room with her protégé with an air which implied:

“Look at me! I’m the woman who made a lion!”

She wore a tiger skin and left Mr. Beelbrow at home to look after the live stock.

And after the first flush of triumph and excitement, Skratch treated Mrs. Beelbrow with complete indifference and contempt. He left lighted cigar-ends on the lid of the grand piano, spilt wine on his bed-linen, walked about the house all day in a dressing-gown, threw his boots at the servants, and snubbed visitors. He would get up from table in the middle of a meal and walk out of the room without an apology. He was even rude to her in public, and she revelled in it. The ruder he was the more delighted she appeared. She would glance round the room proudly, as much as to say:

“There! didn’t I tell you I had made a lion?”

They went about everywhere together. They went to the opera, the theatre, to concerts and receptions, for motor rides in the country, and they

were always alone. Mr. Beelbrow was very busy, you see, making money in the city. (He had to do that to pay for Herr Skratch's publicity campaign.) Of course, people began to talk. They might have talked on much less evidence than they had. The thing was simply thrown at them. She glued herself to him, and he accepted her and what she gave him as only right and proper. Sometimes he would treat her with playful familiarity. He would put his arm round her shoulders and call her "ol gel!" All very well, but how old really was Mrs. Beelbrow? What was happening in the dark places of *her* heart? Of course, it couldn't go on for ever. We all shook our heads and were very wise, and we were right. It went on for nine months, and then Mr. Beelbrow—no, Mr. Beelbrow did nothing. He just sat tight, helped people to hock-cup, and expatiated upon his wife's remarkable character and abilities. The disruption came from outside.

Another woman appeared on the scene. Her name was Fanny Friedlander. She was an accompanist. Now, if you had wanted to invent a complete antithesis to Mrs. Beelbrow, Fanny would have saved you the trouble. She was it. She was young, common, ignorant and frivolous; at the same time she had emotional warmth. There was something sympathetic and lovable about her. She was not exclusively a man-hunter. She liked to be petted and admired. When she accompanied she wore red carnations in her hair, and cast glad, furtive

glances at the audience, and sometimes at the soloist, who, of course, was Herr Skrâtch.

Herr Skrâtch was not the kind of gentleman to make any bones about such a position. He flirted with her outrageously, even on the platform. Whether Mrs. Beelbrow made any protest about this affair at its inception is not known. By the time the infatuation was apparent it was too late. Inflated by his meretricious successes, he was in no mood to brook interference. Mrs. Beelbrow's face expressed little. I really believe she was rather fascinated by the girl herself. She seemed to be watching a little bewildered and uncertain how to act.

It ended in the three of them going about everywhere together, the usual unsatisfactory triangle. The fact that she had to play his accompaniments was sufficient excuse for Fanny Friedlander to go with him to concerts where he was playing, and to call at Mrs. Beelbrow's for rehearsals, but hardly an excuse for her to go to the opera, the theatre, and motor rides, or even to stop all the afternoon at Mrs. Beelbrow's and then to stay on to dinner. It was surmised that Mrs. Beelbrow only tolerated it because she knew that if she turned the girl out, Skrâtch would have gone with her. She appeared to be content with the crumbs the younger woman left over. Ah! but only for the moment, we were convinced.

At that time, as if conscious of his delinquency, Herr Skrâtch was a little more polite to Mrs. Beelbrow; whilst the girl made no end of a fuss of her in a

loud common way that must have jarred the good lady's sensibilities horribly. We waited to see what would happen next, what would be the next move of Mrs. Beelbrow to rid herself of this dangerous rival. To our surprise, a few weeks later the girl went there to live. She was actually living in the Beelbrow's house! Was there ever a queerer *ménage à quatre*? There was Mrs. Beelbrow, the lion-hunter, badly mauled by one of her own lions, entertaining her most dangerous enemy. She must have shut her eyes to all kinds of things. Skratch was behaving abominably. The girl was not the kind you could trust anyway. There was Mr. Beelbrow, quite negative, merely earning the money to support the absurd drama.

"It's incredible," said Jimmy Beale, one night in the club, "that a woman as conceited as Mrs. Beelbrow is could possibly put up with such a damned indignity. It's making her look the prize fool of London."

"Love is more powerful than a sense of dignity," remarked some sententious bore from the corner.

Love? Well, an unanalyzable quantity. I was perhaps the only one fortunate enough to have the opportunity to judge of the *dénouement* by any practical evidence. And even then it was only a fluke, a glance. It occurred a few nights before Skratch disappeared. Some say he went back to the obscure café in Budapest, taking the girl with him. It is hardly likely in view of the handsome *dot* which someone presented to Fanny.



It was one of Mrs. Beelbrow's most overwhelming crushes. You could not hear yourself speak for the roar of lions. I was squeezed against the folding doors. Behind a palm in the corner was an empire mirror, tilted at an angle. It was about the only thing I could see. It gave me a good view of certain people a little farther down the room. The first person I saw was Mrs. Beelbrow, and as I glanced at her I saw an expression come over her face, an expression I can only describe as one of blind jealousy—a nasty, vindictive, dangerous look.

“Oh, ho!” I thought, and sought for the reflection of Fanny or Herr Skrâtch. But to my astonishment I realized very clearly that her glance was not directed at these two at all. She was looking at Mr. Beelbrow, whose wicked, malevolent little eyes were fixed on Fanny's. Skrâtch for the moment was occupied with some other woman.

You might imagine that the defection of Skrâtch would have broken Mrs. Beelbrow's heart for the business. But, oh dear, no! don't you believe it. Whatever you may say or think about Mrs. Beelbrow, she has proved herself a true and indomitable lion-hunter. Only last Thursday I was again in her crowded drawing-room. A little East-end Jewess was playing the piano quite nicely. Mrs. Beelbrow was standing by the folding-doors, her face set and taut. When the child had finished, she murmured:

“Ah, if Teresa Carreño could have heard that! Teresa never reached that velvety warmth in her

mezzo passages. I believe the child must be the reincarnation of—who would it be? Liszt? No, someone more southern, more Byzantine. I will make her a lion.”

In the refreshment-room Mr. Beelbrow was ladling out hock-cup as usual. When I approached him he said:

“Halloa, old boy! Have some of this? Good! Have you seen my wife? She’s a wonderful woman—wonderful—um-m.”

## A MAN OF LETTERS

ALFRED CODLING TO ANNIE PHELPS

MY DEAR ANNIE,

I got into an awful funny mood lately. You'll think I'm barmy. It comes over me like late in the evenin' when its gettin dusky. It started I think when I was in Egypt. Nearly all us chaps who was out there felt it a bit I think. When you was on sentry go in the dessert at night it was so quite and missterius. You felt you wanted to *know* things if you know what I mean. Since I've come back and settled in the saddlery again I still feel it most always. A kind of discontented funny feelin if you know what I mean. Well old girl what I mean is when we're spliced up and settled over in Tibbelsford I want to be good for you and I want to know all about things and that. Well I'm goin to write to Mr. Weekes whose a gentleman and who lives in a private house near the church. They say he is a littery society and if it be so I'm on for joinin it. You'll think I'm barmy won't you. It isn't that old dear. Me that has always been content to do my job and draw my screw on Saturday and that. You'll think me funny. When you've lived in the dessert you feel how old it all is. You want something and you don't know

what it is praps its just to improve yourself and that. Anyway there it is and I'll shall write to him. See you Sunday. So long, dear.

ALF.

ALFRED CODLING TO JAMES WEEKES, ESQ.

DEAR SIR,

Someone tells me you are a littery society in Tibbelsford. In which case may I offer my services as a member and believe me.

Your obedient servant

ALFRED CODLING.

PENDRED CASTAWAY (SECRETARY TO JAMES WEEKES, ESQ.) TO ALFRED CODLING.

DEAR SIR,

In reply to your letter of the 27th inst. I beg to inform you that Mr. James Weekes is abroad. I will communicate the contents of your letter to him.

Yours faithfully,

PENDRED CASTAWAY.

ANNIE PHELPS TO ALFRED CODLING

MY DEAR ALF,

You are a dear old funny old bean. What *is* up with you. I expeck you are just fed up. You haven't had another tutch of the fever have you. I will come and look after you Sunday. You are a silly to talk about improvin considerin the money you

are gettin and another rise next spring you say. I expeck you got fed up in the dessert and that didn't you. I expeck you wanted me sometimes, eh? I shouldn't think the littery society much cop myself. I can lend you some books. Cook is a great reader. She has nearly all Ethel M. Dells and most of Charles Garvice. She says she will lend you some if you promiss to cover in brown paper and not tare the edges. They had a big party here over the weekend a curnel a bishop two gentleman and some smart women one very nice she gave me ten bob. We could go to the pictures come Wednesday if agreeable. Milly is walking out with a feller over at Spindlehurst in the grossery a bit flashy I don't like him much. Mrs. Vaughan had one of her attacks on Monday. Lord she does get on my nerves when she's like that. Well be good and cheerio must now close. Love and kisses till Sunday.

ANNIE.

JAMES WEEKES, ESQ. (MALAGA, SPAIN) TO ALFRED  
CODLING

DEAR SIR,

My secretary informs me that you wish to join our literary society in Tibbelsford. It is customary to be proposed and seconded by two members.

Will you kindly send me your qualifications?

Yours faithfully,

JAMES WEEKES.

## ALFRED CODLING TO ANNIE PHELPS

MY DEAR ANNIE,

Please thank Cook for the two books which I am keepin rapt up and will not stain. I read the Eagles mate and think it is a pretty story. As you know dear I am no fist at explaining myself. At the pictures the other night you were on to me again about gettin on and that. It isn't that. Its difficul to explane what I mean. I expeck I will always be able to make good money enough. If you havent been throw it you cant know what its like. Its somethin else I want if you know what I mean. To be honest I did not like the picturs the other night. I thought they were silly but I like to have you sittin by me and holding your hand. If I could tell you what I mean you would know. I have heard from Mr. Weekes about the littery and am writin off at once. Steve our foreman has got sacked for pinchin lether been goin on for yeres so must close with love till Sunday. ALF.

## ALFRED CODLING TO JAMES WEEKES, ESQ.

DEAR SIR,

As regards your communication you ask what are my quallifications. I say I have no quallifications sir nevertheless I am wishful to join the littery. I will be candid with you sir. I am not what you might call a littery or eddicated man at all. I am in

the saddlery. I was all throw Gallipoli and Egypt L/corporal in the 2/15th Mounted Blumshires. It used to come over me like when I was out there alone in the dessert. Prehaps sir you will understand me when I say it for I find folks do not understand me about it not even the girl I walk out with Annie Phelps, who is as nice a girl a feller could wish. Prehaps sir you have to have been throw if it you know what I mean. When you are alone at night in the dessert its all so big and quite you want to get to know things and all about things if you know what I mean sir so prehaps you will pass me in the littery.

Your obedient servant  
ALFRED CODLING.

ANNIE PHELPS TO ALFRED CODLING

DEAR ALF,

You was funny Sunday. I dont know whats up with you. You never used to be that glum I call it. Is it thinking about this littery soc turnin your head or what. Millie says you come into the kitchen like a boiled oul you was. Cheer up ole dear till Sunday week.

ANNIE.

JAMES WEEKES, ESQ., TO ALFRED CODLING

DEAR SIR,

Allow me to thank you for your charming letter. I feel that I understand your latent desires perfectly.

I shall be returning to Tibbelsford in a week's time when I hope to make your acquaintance. I feel sure that you will make a desirable member of our literary society.

Yours cordially,  
JAMES WEEKES.

JAMES WEEKES TO SAMUEL CHILDERS

MY DEAR SAM,

I received the enclosed letter yesterday and I hasten to send it on to you. Did you ever read anything more delightful? We must certainly get Alfred Codling into our society. He sounds the kind of person who would make a splendid foil to old Baldwin with his tortuous metaphysics—that is, if we can only get him to talk.

Yours ever,  
J. W.

SAMUEL CHILDERS TO JAMES WEEKES

MY DEAR CHAP,

You are surely not serious about the ex-corporal! I showed his letter to Fanny. She simply screamed with laughter. But of course you mean it as a joke proposing him for the "littery." Hope to see you on Friday.

Ever yours,  
S. C.



## ALFRED CODLING TO ANNIE PHELPS

MY DEAR ANNIE,

I was afraid you would begin to think I was barmy dear I always said so but you musnt take it like that. It is difficult to tell you about but you know my feelins to you is as always. Now I have to tell you dear that I have seen Mr. Weekes he is a very nice old gentlemen indeed he is very kind he says I can go to his hous anytime and read his books he has hundreds and hundreds. I have nevver seen so many books you have to have a ladder to clime up to some of them he is very kind he says he shall propose me for the littery soc and I can go when I like he ast me all about mysel and that was very kind and plesant he told me all about what books I was to read and that so I think dear I wont be goin to the picturs Wendesday but will meet you by the Fire statesion Sunday as usual.

Your lovin

ALF.

## EPHRAIM BALDWIN TO JAMES WEEKES

MY DEAR WEEKS,

I'm afraid I cannot understand your attitude in proposing and getting Childers to second this hobble-dehoy called Alfred Codling. I have spoken to him and I am quite willing to acknowledge that he may be a very good young man in his place. But why

join a literary society? Surely we want to raise the intellectual standard of the society, not lower it? He is absolutely ignorant. He knows nothing at all. Our papers and discussions will be Greek to him. If you wanted an extra hand in your stables or a jobbing gardener well and good, but I must sincerely protest against this abuse of the fundamental purposes of our society.

Yours sincerely,  
EPHRAIM BALDWIN.

FANNY CHILDERS TO ELSPETH PRITCHARD

DEAR OLD THING,

I must tell you about a perfect scream that is happening here. You know the Tibbelsford literary society that Pa belongs to, and also Jimmy Weekes? Well, it's like this. Dear Old Jimmy is always doing something eccentric. The latest thing is he has discovered a mechanic in the leather trade with a soul! (I'm not sure I ought not to spell it the other way). He is also an ex-soldier and was out in the East. He seems to have become imbued with what they called "Eastern romanticism." Anyway, he wanted to join the Society, and old Weekes rushed Pa into seconding him, and they got him through. And now a lot of the others are up in arms about it—especially old Baldwin—you know, we call him "Permanganate of Potash." If you saw him you'd know why, but I can't tell you. I have been to two of the

meetings specially to observe the mechanic with the soul. He is really quite a dear. A thick-set, square-chinned little man with enormous hands with a heavy silver ring on the third finger of his left, and tattoo marks on his right wrist. He sits there with his hands spread out on his knees and stares round at the members as though he thinks they are a lot of lunatics. The first evening he came the paper was on "The influence of Erasmus on modern theology," and the second evening "The drama of the Restoration." No wonder the poor soul looks bewildered. He never says a word. How is Tiny? I was in town on Thursday and got a duck of a hat. Do come over soon.

Crowds of love,  
FAN.

## JAMES WEEKES TO ALFRED CODLING

MY DEAR CODLING,

I quite appreciate your difficulty. I would suggest that you read the following books in the order named. You will find them in my library:

Jevon's "Primer of Logic,"

Welton's "Manual of Logic,"

Brackenbury's "Primer of Psychology," and

Professor James' "Text book of Psychology,"

Do not be discouraged!

Sincerely yours,  
JAMES WEEKES.

## ANNIE PHELPS TO ALFRED CODLING

DEAR ALF,

I dont think you treat me quite fare You says you are sweet on me and that and then you go on in this funny way It isnt my falt that you got the wind up in Egypt I dont know what you mean by all this I wish the ole littery soc was dead and finish. Cook say you probibly want a blue pill you was so glum Sunday. Dont you see all these gents and girls and edicated coves are pullin youre leg if you dont know what they talkin about and that Your just makin a fule of yourself and then what about me you dont think of me its makin me a fule too. Milly says *she* wouldent have no truck with a book lowse so there it is.

ANNIE.

## ALFRED CODLING TO JAMES WEEKES, ESQ.

DEAR SIR,

I am much oblided to you for puttin me on them books It beats me how they work up these things. I'm afeard I'm not scollard enough to keep the pace with these sayins and that. Its the same with the littery I lissen to the talk and sometimes I think Ive got it and then no. Sometimes I feels angry with the things said I know the speakers wrong but I cant say I feel they wrong but I dont know what to say to say it. Theres some things to big to say isnt that sir. Im much oblided to you sir for what you done

Beleave me I enjoy the littery altho I most always dont know the talk I know who are the rite ones and who are the rong ones If you have been throw what I have been throw you would know the same sir Beleave me your

obedient servant

ALFRED CODLING.

EPHRAIM BALDWIN TO EDWIN JOPE, SECRETARY TO  
THE TIBBELSFORD LITERARY SOCIETY

DEAR JOPE,

For my paper on the 19th prox. I propose to discuss "The influence of Hegelism on modern psychology."

Yours ever,

EPHRAIM BALDWIN.

EDWIN JOPE TO EPHRAIM BALDWIN

DEAR MR. BALDWIN,

I have issued the notices of your forthcoming paper. The subject, I am sure, will make a great appeal to our members, and I feel convinced that we are in for an illuminating and informative evening. With regard to our little conversation on Wednesday last, I am entirely in agreement with you with regard to the quite inexplicable action of Weekes in introducing the "leather mechanic" into the society. It appears to me a quite superfluous effrontery to put upon our members. We do not want to lose Weekes but I feel that he ought to be asked to give some

explanation of his conduct. As you remark, it lowers the whole standard of the society. We might as well admit agricultural labourers, burglars, grooms and barmaids, and the derelicts of the town. I shall sound the opinion privately of other members.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

EDWIN JOPE.

ANNIE PHELPS TO ALFRED CODLING

All right then you stick to your old littery. I am sendin you back your weddin ring you go in and out of that place nevver thinkin of me Aunt siad how it would be you goin off and cetterer and gettin ideas into your head what do you care I doant think you care at all I expeck you meet a lot of these swell heads there men *and women* and you get talkin and thinkin you someone All these years you away I wated for you faithfull I never had a thowt for other fellers and then you go on like this and treat me in this way Aunt says she wouldnt put up and Milly says a book lowse is worse than no good and so I say goodby and thats how it is now forever You have broken my hart

ANNE.

ANNIE PHELPS TO ALFRED CODLING

I cried all nite I didndt mean quite all I says you know how I mene dear Alf if you was only reesonible

I doant mind you goin the littery if you eggsplain yourself For Gawds sake meet me tonight by the fire stachon and eggsplain everything.

Your broke hearted

ANNE.

JAMES WEEKES TO SAMUEL CHILDERS

MY DEAR SAM,

I hope Harrogate is having the desired effect upon you. I was about to say that you have missed few events of any value or interest during your absence, but I feel I must qualify that statement. You have missed a golden moment. The great Baldwin evening has come and gone and I deplore the fact that you were not there. My sense of gratification, however, is not due to Ephraim himself but to my unpopular protégé and white elephant—Alfred Codling. I tell you it was glorious! Ephraim spoke for an hour and a half, the usual thing, a dull *réchauffée* of Schopenhauer and Hegel, droning forth platitudes and half-baked sophistries. When it was finished the chairman asked if anyone else wished to speak. To my amazement my ex-lance-corporal rose heavily to his feet. His face was brick red and his eyes glowed with anger. He pointed his big fingers at Ephraim and exclaimed: “Yes, talk, talk, talk—that’s all it is. There’s nothing in it at all!” and he hobbled out of the room (you know he was wounded in the right foot). The position, as you may imagine,

was a little trying. I did not feel in the mood to stay and make apologies. I hurried after Codling. I caught him up at the end of the lane. I said, "Codling, why did you do that?" He could not speak for a long time, then he said: "I'm sorry, sir. It came over me like, all of a sudden." We walked on. At the corner by Harvey's mill we met a girl. Her face was wet—there was a fine rain pouring at the time. They looked at each other these two, then she suddenly threw out her arms and buried her face on his chest. I realized that this was no place for me and I hurried on. The following morning I received the enclosed letter. Please return it to me.

Yours ever,

JAMES.

ALFRED CODLING TO JAMES WEEKES

DEAR SIR,

Please to irrase my name from the littery soc. I feel I have treated you bad about it but there it is. I apologize to you for treatin you bad like this that is all I regret You have always been kind and pleasant to me lendin me the books and that. I shall always be grateful to you for what you have done. It all came over me sudden like last night while that chap was spoutin out about what you call *physology*. I had never heard tell on the word till you put me on to it and now they all talk about it. I looked it up in the diction and it says somethin



about the science of mind and that chap went on spoutin about it. I had quarrel with my girl we had nevver quarrel before and I was very down about it. She is the best girl a feller could wish and I have always said so. Somehow last night while he was spoutin on it came over me sudden I thowt of the nights I had spent alone in the dessert when it was all quite and missterous and big. I had been throw it all sir. I had seen my pals what was alive one minnit blown to peices the next. I had tramped hundreds of miles and gone without food and watter. I had seen hell itsel sir And when you are always with death like that sir you are always so much alive You are alive and then the next minnit you may be dead and it makes you want to feel in touch like with everythin You cant hate noone when you like that You think of the other feller over there whose thinkin like you are prehaps and he all alone to lookin up the blinkin stars and it comes over you that its only love that holds us all together love and nothin else at all My hart was breakin thinkin of Annie what I had treated so bad and what I had been throw and he went on spoutin and spoutin What does he know about *physology* You have to had been very near death to find the big things thats what I found out and I couldnt tell these littery blokes that thats why I lost my temper and so please to irrase me from the soc They cant teach me nothen that matters I've seen it all and I cant teach them nothen because they havent been throw it What I have larnt is sir that

theres somethin big in our lives apart from getting on and comfits and good times and so sir I am much oblidgeed for all you done for me and except my appology for the way I treat you

Your obedient servant,  
ALFRED CODLING.

JAMES WEEKES TO EDWIN JOPE

DEAR JOPE,

In reply to your letter, I cannot see my way to apologize or even dissociate myself with the views expressed by Mr. Alfred Codling at our last meeting, consequently I must ask you to accept my resignation.

Yours very truly,  
JAMES WEEKES.

SAMUEL CHILDERS TO EDWIN JOPE

DEAR JOPE,

Taking into consideration all the circumstances of the case, I must ask you to accept my resignation from the Tibbelsford Literary Society.

Yours faithfully,  
S. CHILDERS.

ANNIE PHELPS TO ALFRED CODLING

MY DEAR ALF,

Of course its all right. I am all right now dear Alf

I will try and be a good wife to you I amnt clever like you with all your big thowts and that but I will and be a good wife to you Aunt Em is goin to give us that horses-hair and mother saystherell be tweanty-five pounds comin to me when Uncle Steve pegs out and he has the dropsie all right already What do you say to Aperil if we can git that cottidge of Mrs. Plummers mothers See you Sunday

love from

ANNIE.

x x x x x x x x x x

EPHRAIM BALDWIN TO EDWIN JOPE

DEAR MR. JOPE,

As no apology has been forthcoming to me *from any quarter* for the outrageous insult I was subjected to on the occasion of my last paper, I must ask you to accept my resignation.

Yours faithfully,  
EPHRAIM BALDWIN, O.B.E.

ALFRED CODLING TO ANNIE PHELPS

MY DEAR ANNE,

You will be please to hear they made me foreman this will mean an increas and so on I think April; will be alright Mr. Weekes sent me check for fifty pounds to start farnishin but I took it back I said no I could not accep it havin done nothin to earn it and treatin him so bad over that littery soc but he said yes and he put it in such a way that I accep after all

so we shall be alright for farnishin at the present  
 He was very kind and he says we was to go to him  
 at any time and I was to go on readin the books he  
 says I shall find good things in them but not the  
 littery soc he says he has left it hissself I feel I treated  
 him very bad but I could not stand that feller spoutin  
 and him nevver havin been throw it like what I have  
 That dog of Charly's killed one of Mrs. Reeves  
 chickens Monday so must now close till Sunday with  
 love from

Your soon husband (dont it sound funny?)

ALF.

EDWIN JOPE TO WALTER BUNNING

DEAR SIR,

In reply to your letter I beg to say that the Tibbels-  
 ford Literary Society is dissolved.

Yours faithfully,

E. JOPE.

## “FACE”

**I**T WILL not, of course, surprise you to know that it was at the Cravenford National School that he was first known as “Face.” The people of Essex are well-known for their candour and lucidity of expression. He was an exceptionally—well, plain boy. There was nothing abnormal, or actually mal-formed about him, it was only that his features had that perambulatory character which is the antithesis of classic. It was what the Americans call a “homely” face. The proportions were all just wrong, the ears slightly protruding, the jaw too lantern, the eyes actually too wide apart. Moreover, his figure was clumsy in the extreme. He seemed all hands, and feet, and knees, and chin. It was impossible for him to pass any object without kicking it. Neither was his personality enhanced by his manner, which was taciturn and sullen, *gauche* in the extreme. The games and amusements of other boys held no attractions for him. He made no friends, exchanged no confidences, distinguished himself at nothing. Yet those of the impatient world who found time to devote a second glance to this uncouth exterior were bound to be impressed by the appeal of those deep brown expectant eyes.

They were not essentially intelligent eyes, but they had a kind of breadth of sympathy, a profound watchfulness, like the eyes of some caged animal to whom the full functions of its being had not so far been revealed.

It was the universality of this nick-name, "Face," which preserved it, for the boys of Cravenford National School knew that Caleb Fryatt resented it, and individually they feared him. That very clumsiness and imperviousness of his was apt to be overwhelming when adapted to militant purposes. Not that he was easy to rouse, but it was difficult to know when he was roused—he gave no outward manifestation of it—but when he was, it was difficult to get him to stop. He was a grim and merciless fighter, who could take punishment with a kind of morbid relish. It only inspired him to a more terrible onslaught. The boys preferred to attack him in company, and then usually vocally, by peeping over the churchyard wall and calling out:

"Face! Face! Oh, my! There's a face!"

The tragic setting of his home life explained much. He had had a brother and two elder sisters, all of whom had died in infancy. He lived with his father and mother in a meagre dilapidated cottage a mile beyond the church. His father worked at a stud farm, at such moments as the mood for work was upon him. He was a man of morose and vicious temper, quickened by spasmodic outbreaks of alcoholic indulgence. Of poor physique, he was never-

theless a dangerous engine of destruction in these moods, particularly in respect to the frailer sex. Caleb had been brought up in a code which recognized unquestioningly the right of might, which accepted tears and blows as a natural concomitant to its reckoning. He had stood powerless and affrighted at the vision of his little mother beaten unreasonably almost to insensibility, and he had never heard her complain. His own body was scarred by the thousand attentions of sticks and belts. He, too, had not complained. In some dumb way he suffered more from the blows his mother received than he did from those he received himself.

But he was growing up now—ugly, clumsy old "Face." When at the age of fourteen he passed through the first standard and out of the school, he was already as tall as his father, and somewhat thicker in girth, more agile, tougher in fibre. The significance of this development did not occur to him at the time. He was sent to work at Sam Hurds', the blacksmith, a dour, intelligent, religious giant, who instructed him in the intricacies of his craft with relentless thoroughness, but without much sympathy. The boy liked the work, although he showed no great aptitude at it. He had a way of plodding on, appearing to understand, serving long hours, and then in a period of abstraction forgetting all that he had been told. He loved the blazing forge, the clang of metal upon metal, the sheen

upon the carter's horses that came in to be shod the sunlight making patterns on the road outside. . . .

He was two years with Sam Hurds. At seventeen his muscles were like a man's. His overgrown, hulking body like a fully developed farm labourer's. His appearance had not improved. Even the smith adopted the village nick-name and called him "Face." At first it was "Young Face," then "Face," then as their sombre familiarity developed, and the smith realized the boy's sound qualities and the something far too old for his years, it became "Old Face." He knew that his assistant had no powers of adaptability, little invention, not a very real grasp of the essentials, but at the same time he knew he could trust him. He would do precisely as he was told. He would stick to it. He could be relied upon like a sheep dog. Nothing could shift him from his post of duty.

The smith was right, but he had not allowed for those outward thrusts of fate which upset the soberest plans.

One night Caleb arrived home and found his mother crying. He had never seen her cry before. He regarded her spell-bound.

"What is it, mother?"

"Nothing, lad, nothing. Come, your tea's keeping warm upon the hob. There's a pasty——"

"Nay, you wouldn't cry for nowt, mother. Lift up your head."



She lifted up her head and dashed the tears away, but as she moved toward the kitchen he noticed that she was trying to conceal a limp. He caught her up.

“He has been striking you again.”

“It’s nothing, lad.”

“Show me.”

He pulled her down to him and she wept again. Lifting the hem of her skirt, she revealed her leg above the ankle, bound up in linen.

“He kicked me, dear, but it is nothing. It will pass.”

Caleb ate his tea in silence. His table manners were never of the finest, and on this occasion he masticated his food, and swilled his tea, like an animal preoccupied with some disturbance of its normal life. Afterward he sat apart and thought, his mother busy with household matters. Later she popped across the road to a neighbouring cottage to borrow some ointment.

While she was out his father returned. It was getting dark, and a fine rain was beginning to fall. His father came stumbling up the cottage garden singing. Caleb blocked his passage in the little entrance hall, and said deliberately:

“You didn’t ought to have kicked mother.”

His father, emerging from the shock of surprise, scowled at him.

“What’s that?”

“You didn’t ought to have kicked mother.”

For a moment Stephen Fryatt was speechless,

then he lurched forward and pushed his son away.

“What the devil’s it to do with you, whipper-snapper?”

Caleb thrust his father back against the wall and repeated:

“You didn’t ought to have kicked her.”

Then Stephen saw red. He struck at his son with his clenched hand, and the blow split the boy’s ear. Caleb took his father by the throat and shook him. The latter tried to bring his knee into play. At this foul method of attack, Caleb, too, became angry. Those long powerful fingers gripped tighter. He closed up, and flung his father’s body against the lintel of the door. He did not realize his own newly developed strength. When his mother returned a little later she found her man lying in the passage with the back of his head in a pool of blood, her son hovering ghost-like in the background. She gave a cry:

“What’s this ye’ve done, Caleb?”

A hollow voice came out of the darkness:

“He didn’t ought to have kicked ye, mother.”

She screamed and, kneeling upon the floor, she supported the battered head upon her knee. It appeared an unrecognizable thing, the hair so much blacker in the ivory-hued face, the eyes staring stupidly.

Followed then a shifting phantasmagoria, scenes and emotions incomprehensible to the defender. Neighbours, and doctors and policemen, talking and

arguing, whispering together, pointing at him. He was led away. In all that early turmoil, and in the more bewildering proceedings which followed, the one thing which impressed him deeply was the attitude of his mother. She had changed toward him entirely. She accused him, reviled him, even cursed him. He would ponder upon this in his dark cell at night. He had never imagined that his mother could have loved his father—not in that way, not to that extent. His brown ox-like eyes tried to penetrate the darkness for some solution. He had no fear as to what they would do with him, but everything was inexplicable . . . unsatisfying. The days and weeks which followed—he lost all sense of time—added to the sense of mystification. He appeared to be passed from one judge to another, beginning with a gentleman in a tweed suit and knickerbockers, and ending with a very old man in a white wig and gold-rimmed glasses, of whom only the head and the thin pale fingers seemed visible. Yes, yes, why did they keep on torturing him like this? He had answered all the questions again and again, always giving the same replies, always ending up with the solemn asseveration:

“He didn’t ought to have kicked her.”

At the same time he had never meant to kill his father. He had under-estimated his strength. He had become very strong in the forge. His father had attacked him first. It was unfortunate that the back of Mr. Fryatt’s head had struck the sharp corner of

the lintel post. He was in any case crazy with drink. The boy was only seventeen. He believed he was defending his mother. Of course, these pleas were not his. This version of the case had not occurred to him, but to his surprise a learned-looking gentleman, who had visited him in his cell, had stood up in Court and made them vehemently. And hearing the case put like that Caleb nodded his head. He hadn't thought of it in that light, but it was quite true. Oh, but the arguments which ensued! The long words and phrases, the delays, and pomp and uncertainty. Never once did the question seem to come up as to whether his father "ought to have done it," or not. According to his mother his father appeared to have been almost a paragon of a father.

It was all settled at last, and he was sent away to a "Home" for two years.

Home! The ironic travesty of the word penetrated his thick skull immediately he had passed what looked like a prison gate. There were two hundred boys in this home. It seemed strange to live in a home ruled over by a governor in uniform, policed by gaolers and superintendents. Strange to have a home one could not leave at will, where iron discipline turned one out at dawn, drove one like a slave to long hours of hard and uncongenial work. Strange that home should breathe bitterness and distrust, that it should be under a code which seemed to repeat eternally:

“Don’t forget you are a criminal. Young as yet, but the taint is in you!”

It was true there were momentary relaxations, football and other games which he detested, bleak and interminable services in a chapel, organ recitals and concerts. The other boys disgusted him with their endless obscenities and suggestions, their universal conviction that the great thing was to “get through it,” so as to be able to resume those criminal practices inherent in them, practices which the home did nothing to eradicate or relieve.

If “Old Face” had not been of the toughest fibre, dull witted, impervious, and in a sense unawakened, those two years would have broken him. As it was they dulled his sensibilities even more, they embittered him. Those brown eyes had almost lost that straining glance of expectancy, as though the home had taught him that there was nothing for him in any case to expect. He was a criminal, hall-marked for eternity. When he had been there six months they sent for him to go and visit the chaplain. That good man looked very impressive, and announced that the governor had received information that Caleb’s mother was dead, and that it was his solemn duty to break the news to him. He appeared relieved that the boy did not at once burst into tears. He then delivered a little homily on life and death, and pointed out that it was Caleb’s evil and vicious actions which had hastened his mother’s death. He advised him to pour out his heart in penitence to

God, who was always our Rock and Saviour in times of tribulation. He quoted passages from Leviticus, and Caleb stared at him dully, thinking the while:

“I’ll never see my mother again, never, never.”

He did not give way to grief. The news only bewildered him the more. He went about his duties in the home stolidly. He was quite an exemplary inmate, hardly up to the average standard of quickness and intelligence, but quiet, obedient, and well behaved. At the end of his term of service he was sent up before the governor and other officials. The clumsy scrawl of his signature was demanded upon innumerable forms. He believed he was once more to be a free man. And so he was in a qualified sense. But he was not to escape without the seal of the institution being indelibly stamped upon him. In round-about phrases the governor explained that he was to leave the home, but he was not to imagine that he was a free agent to go about the world murdering whomever he liked. He was still a criminal, requiring supervision and watching. Out of their Christian charity the governors had found employment for him at a timber merchant’s at Bristol. Thither he would go, but he must remember that he was still under their protection. Every few weeks he must report to the police. Any act of disobedience on his part would be treated—well, by a sterner authority. On the next occasion he would not be sent to a nice comfortable establishment like the home, where they played football and had con-

certs, but to Wormwood Scrubbs or Dartmoor. Did he understand? Oh, yes, Caleb understood—at least, partly. He was to be free, free in a queer way.

The arrangement did not exactly tally with his sense of freedom, any more than this building tallied with his idea of home, but he was only nineteen and his body was strong and his spirit not completely broken. Any ideas he may have entertained that the new life was going to spell freedom in any sense were quickly shattered. The timber merchant at Bristol was a man named Barnet, a tyrant of the worst description. He knew the kind of material he was handling. Most of his employees were ex-convicts, ticket-of-leave-men, Lascars, or social derelicts. He acted accordingly. Caleb slept in a shed with nine other men, four of whom were coloured. They worked ten hours' a day loading timber on barges. They were given greasy cocoa and bread at six o'clock in the morning, a meal of potatoes and little square lumps of hard meat at twelve, then tea and bread at four o'clock in the afternoon. In addition to this he was paid twelve shillings a week. The slightest act of insubordination or slackness was met with the threat:

“Here, you! Any more of that and you go back to where you came from!”

Before he had been there a month he felt that the home was indeed a home in comparison. Strangely enough, it was one of the coloured men who rescued him from his thralldom, a pleasant voiced coon with

only one eye. He appeared to take a fancy to Caleb. One night he came to him and whispered:

“Say, boss, would you like to beat it?”

It took some time for the boy from Cravenford to understand the coloured man’s phraseology and plan, but when he did, he fell in with it with alacrity. The following Saturday they visited a little public-house down by the docks and were there introduced to a grizzled mate. Hands were wanted on a merchant-man sailing for Buenos Ayres the following week. The coloured man was a free agent and he signed on, and Caleb signed on in the name of J. Bullock. Two nights before sailing he hid in a barge and joined his ship the following morning. All day long he experienced the tremors of dread for the first time in his life. The primitive instinct of escape and the call of the sea was upon him. He could have danced with joy when he heard the rattling of the chains, and the hoarse cries of the deck hands as the big ship got under way at dusk.

The voyage to Buenos Ayres was uneventful. The work was hard and the discipline severe, but he was conscious all the time of sensing the first draught of freedom that he had experienced since he left his village. This feeling was accentuated at port when he realized that after being paid off, he was free to leave the ship. But the rigid magnificence of Buenos Ayres depressed him. He learnt that after unloading they were to refit and convey cattle to Durban in South Africa, so he signed on again for the next voy-



age. This proved to be a formidable experience. A week out they ran into very heavy seas. He was detailed to attend the cattle. The cattle superintendent was a drunken bully. The stench among the cattle pens, added to the violent heaving of the ship, brought on sickness, but he was not allowed any respite. The cattle themselves were seasick, and many of them died and had to be thrown overboard. The voyage lasted three weeks, and when he arrived at Durban he determined to try his luck once more as a landsman. At that time there was plenty of demand for unskilled labour for men of Caleb's physique in South Africa, but it was poorly paid. He drifted about the country doing odd jobs. He visited Cape Town, Kimberly and Pietermaritzburg. The fever of *wanderlust* was upon him. He never remained in one situation for more than a few months. He was the man who desired to see over the ridge. Perhaps further, just a little further, would be—he knew not what, some answer to the inexpressible yearning within him, deep calling unto deep. At the age of twenty-two he was working on the railroad near Nyanza. They came and told him about the great war, which had just started in Europe. A keen-faced little man, one of the gangers, tapped him on the shoulder and said:

“It's lucky for you lad you're out here. Otherwise they'd be telling you that 'your king and country need you'.”

The phrase disturbed him. Night after night he

lay awake dreaming of England. Memories of the home and of the timber-merchant at Bristol vanished. He thought only of Cravenford, the gray ivy-coloured church, the rambling high street, the pond by Mr. Larry's farm, the cross-roads where he and another boy named Stoddard had fought one April afternoon, his mother's cottage, now, alas! deserted, but always sacred, old Sam Hurds banging away in the smithy, the rooks circling above the great elms in the park—all, all these things were perhaps in danger whilst he lay sulking in a foreign land. They had called him "Face." Well, why not? He knew he was not particularly pre-possessing. The fellow workmen had always been at great pains to point this out to him. But still—stolidly and indifferently he went about his work, and then one day in the old manner he vanished. . . .

We will not attempt to record Caleb's experiences of the war. He had no difficulty in joining a volunteer unit in Capetown, which was drafted to England. There he asked to be transferred to one of his own county regiments. The request was overlooked in the clamour of those days. He found himself with a cockney infantry regiment, and he remained with it through the whole course of the war. His life was identical to that of his many million comrades. In some respects he seemed to enjoy lapses of greater freedom than he had experienced for a long time. He was better fed, better clothed, better looked after. He had money in his pocket which he knew not what

to do with. He made a good soldier, doing unquestioningly what he was told, sticking grimly to his post, being completely indifferent to danger.

Save for a few months on the Italian front, he served the whole time in France. He was slightly wounded three times, and in 1917 was awarded a military cross for an astounding feat of bravery in bombing a German dug-out and killing five of the enemy single-handed in the dark. Those queer spiritual strivings so deep down in his nature derived no satisfaction from the war. It was all quite meaningless and incomprehensible. When he left South Africa he had an idea that the fighting would be in England. He visualized grim battles in the fields beyond Cravenford, and he and the other boys from the school defending their village. He had never conceived that a war could be like this. Sometimes he would lie awake at night and ruminate vaguely upon the queer perversity of fate which suddenly made murder popular. He had been turned out of England because he had quite inadvertently killed his father for kicking his mother across the shins, and now he was praised for killing five men within a few minutes. He didn't know, of course, but perhaps some of those men—particularly that elderly plump man who coughed absurdly as he ran on to Caleb's bayonet—perhaps they were better men than his father, although foreigners, although enemy. It was very perplexing. . . .

After a gray eternity of time, the thing came to an

end. He found himself back in England. During the war much had been forgotten and forgiven. No one asked him for his credentials. The police never interfered with him. With his three wound stripes, his military cross, and his papers all in order, he was for a time a *persona grata*.

He had a bonus beyond the pay which he had saved, and he had never been so wealthy in his life. He stayed in London, and tried to adapt himself to a life of luxury and freedom, but he was not happy. In restaurants he was self-conscious, in theatres bored, in the streets bewildered. And so one day he set out and returned to his native village. Strangely, little had it altered! There was the church, the smithy, and the old street all just the same. He called on the smith, who was startled at the sight of him, but on perceiving his stripes and ribbons, reasonably polite. He ransacked the village for old friends. Alas! How many of his school associates had gone, never to return. He called on Mr. Green, the miller, Mrs. Allport, at the general shop, Bob Canning, the carrier. Oh, dear me! yes, they all remembered him, were quite courteous, glad he had done well at the war, got through safely. Well, well! And soon the story got round. "Old Face has returned. Old Face! The boy who murdered his father!"

The novelty of his re-appearance and return soon wore off, and he knew that he was held in distrust in the village. He wandered far afield, and eventually

obtained employment at a brick-works at Keeble, four miles down the valley toward Blaizing-Killstoke. Here the rumours concerning him gradually percolated, but they carried little weight or significance. He was a good workman, and time subdues all things.

Then the strangest miracle happened to Caleb Fryatt. He was nearly thirty, hard-bitten, battered, ill-mannered, with a scar from a bullet on his left cheek, little money, no prospects and no ambition—an unattractive chunk of a man. But what should we all do if love itself were not the greatest miracle of all? Anne Tillie was by no means a beauty herself, but she was not without attraction. She had a round, bright red ingenuous face, a heavily built figure with rather high shoulders and long arms. She was a year older than Caleb and inclined to be deaf, but there was a transparent honesty and simplicity about her. One could see that she would be honest, loyal, and true to all her purposes. She was the daughter of the postman at Blaizing-Killstoke. She and Caleb used to meet in the evenings and wander the lanes together. They did not appear to converse very much, but they would occasionally laugh, and give each other a hearty push. To her father's disgust, these attentions led to marriage the following year. They went to live in a tiny cottage on the outskirts of Keeble, ten minutes' bicycle ride from the works. Anne made an excellent wife. She seemed to understand and adapt herself to her

husband's idiosyncrasies. She kept the cottage spotlessly clean, tended his clothes, and kept him in clean linen, cooked well, and studied all his little wants and peculiarities. She found time to attend to the garden, grow her own vegetables, and even see after a dozen fowls.

Caleb had never enjoyed such material comfort. In the evening they would sit either side of the fire, he with his pipe and she with her sewing. They were an unusually silent couple. Apart from her deafness, they never seemed prompted to exchange more than cursory remarks about the weather, their food, or some matter of local gossip. In the summer they sat in the garden, and watching the blue smoke from his pipe curl away into the amber light of the setting sun, Caleb felt that he had reached a haven after a restless storm. He worked remorsefully hard at the brick-works, and in two years' time was made a kiln foreman, receiving good wages. Malevolent people still whispered the story concerning the boy who murdered his father, and pointed an accusing finger at the back of his bulky form, but no one dared to remind Anne of that tragic happening. She knew the full details of it quite well, and woe to any unfortunate individual who dared to suggest that her man was in the wrong! In course of time he built a barn, and a toolshed, and they bought an adjoining orchard. They kept pigs, and then a pony and trap, and on Thursdays Anne would drive to market, and sell eggs, and chickens and apples. Oh,

yes, they were becoming a prosperous pair. Caleb had surely outlived the ugly vicissitudes of his fate. Was he happy? Was he completely satisfied? Who shall say? The promptings from the soul come from some deep root no one has fathomed. He was conscious of a greater peace than he had ever known. He sometimes hummed a quite unrecognizable tune as he went about his work. The mornings enchanted him with gossamer webs gleaming with dew, swinging between the flowers. But the eyes still sometimes appeared to be seeking—one knows not what.

They had been married five years and seven months when the child was born. It came as a great surprise to Caleb. He had hardly dared to visualize such an eventuality. What a to-do there was in the cottage! Another room to be prepared, strange garments suddenly appearing upon the line in the kitchen, a visiting nurse somewhat important and discursive.

“A boy! Ho!” thought Caleb, as he trundled along on his bicycle the following morning. A boy who would grow up and perhaps become like himself. Well, that was very strange, very remarkable. Most remarkable that such a possibility had never occurred to him. All day long, and for nights and weeks after he thought about the boy who was going one day to be a man like himself. The thought at first worried and perplexed him. Was he—had he been—the kind of man the world would want perpetuated? He felt the fierce censure and distrust

mankind had always lavished upon himself beginning to focus upon the boy, and gradually the protective sense developed in him to a desperate degree. The boy should have better chances than he ever had, the boy should be protected, cared for, shown the way of things. . . . Caleb ruminated. His wife became very dear to him. He was a man on the threshold of revelation. But before his eyes had fully opened to the complete realization of all that this meant to him, a wayward gust of fever shattered the spectrum. The little fellow died when barely four months old. For a time Caleb was most deeply concerned for the health of his wife, who was a victim of the same scourge, but, as she gradually recovered, a feeling of unendurable melancholy crept over him. He began to observe the gray perspective of his life, its past and future. When Anne was once more normal, their intercourse became more taciturn than ever. There fell between them long, empty silences. There were times when he regarded her with boredom, almost with aversion. The years would roll on . . . wander-spirit would assail him. He would be tempted to pick up his cap and go forth and seek some port, where a ship under ballast might be preparing to essay the vast insecurity of heaving waters. But something told him that that would be cruel. His wife's love for him was the most moving experience of his life, far greater than his love for her. She was middle-aged now, and her deafness was more pronounced than ever.



Once she went away to stay with her father for a few days. The morning after she left, a wall in the brickyard collapsed and crushed his right foot. He was carried home in excruciating pain. A neighbour came in and attended him and they fetched the doctor. They wanted to send for his wife but he told them not to bother her. All night he was delirious, and for the next two days and nights he went through a period of torment. As the fever abated a deep feeling of depression crept over him. He began to yearn for his wife profoundly. The neighbour, an elderly woman, wife of the local corn-chandler, was kindness itself. But everything she did was just wrong. How could she know the way Caleb liked things, and he lying there silent and uncomplaining?

On the third evening Anne arrived. She had heard the news. She came bustling into the cottage, dropped her bag, pressed her lips to his.

“Silly Billy, why didn’t you send for me?”

Silly Billy! That was her favourite term of raillery when he had behaved foolishly.

He choked back a desire to cry with relief.

“It’s nothing, nothing to bother about.”

But a feeling of deep contentment crept over him. His eyes regarded her thick plump figure moving busily but quietly about the room. There would be nothing now to disturb or annoy him. Everything would be done just—just as he liked it. She deftly re-arranged the positions of tables, and cups, and

curtains. As the evening wore on she hovered above him, watching his every little movement, like a tigress watching over its cub. She eased the pillow, stroked his hair, and by some adroit manœuvre relieved the pressure on his throbbing leg. A deep sense of tranquillity permeated him. For the first time for three days he felt the desire to sleep, the cottage seemed so inordinately quiet, secure. Once when she was stooping near the chair by the bed, he seized her rough, strong forearm and pulled her to him. He believed he slept at last with her cheeks pressed against his own. . . .

They treated him very well at the brick-works, and his wages were paid every week during his absence. It was nearly two months before he could get about again, and the doctors said he must expect to have a permanent limp. Summer vanished in the October mists, and a long winter dragged through its course. Spring again. Its pulse a little feebler than in the old days? Well, well, what could a man expect? Some of the old desires raised their heads and tugged at his heart-strings. He was very happy—off and on a little soiled, perhaps, by the stress of bitter years, a little more ordinary, a little more sociable. He sometimes visited “The Green Man” and would drink beer with Mr. White, the corn-chandler, and old Tom Smethwick. And after a glass or two he would be quite a social acquisition, and would be inclined to boast a little of his deeds in the Great War, and of his adventures in foreign lands. No

harm in it. Not such a bad sort, Old Face, the boy who murdered his father.

Heigho! But how the years ravage us! 'Twas but a while when things were so and so, and now. . . . He was forty-four when two disturbing factors came into his life, threatening to wreck its calm tenor, and they occurred almost simultaneously. There was a girl at the brick-works who came from London. She was the manager's secretary and she worked in his office. Oh, but she was a smart piece of goods, and the men never tired of discussing her. In the early twenties, distinctly pretty, with a mass of chestnut hair, pert manners and a wrist watch. Passing through the yards, she would sometimes chat with the men at the kilns, and in their dinner hour she would laugh and joke with them. Their estimate of her was not always expressed in very refined or flattering language. Old Ingleton, the time-keeper, swore she had given him the “glad-eye,” but as one of his own eyes was glass, his confession did not carry great weight. She had never singled Caleb out for any particular attention although she was always friendly with him. The cataclysm came upon him quite suddenly one day in late September. He was digging a trench by a mound covered with nettles, and a few tall sunflowers. It was a glorious day and the earth smelt good. He rested on his spade and was enjoying the pleasant tranquillity of the scene, when the girl came round the corner and looked at him. She smiled and exclaimed:

“A lovely day, Mr. Fryatt!”

He instinctively touched his hat and said “Ay.”

And that was the end of the conversation. But Caleb watched her walking up the narrow path toward the manager’s shanty, and some restless fever stirred within him. She was unique. He had seen such women from a distance, smartly apparelled, walking about the streets of London and Capetown, but he had always looked upon them as creatures of a different world from his own, and hardly given them a thought. But here was one smiling at him, speaking to him. After all, she was not so remote. She was a girl, indeed, a working girl, quite accessible and friendly. And what a lithesome, dainty figure! What an appealing pretty face! Those lips! Ugh! A large worm wriggled free from the side of the little trench, and quite unreasonably he cut it in half with his spade.

From that moment forward Caleb began to think of Agnes Fareham. Alas! He began to dream about her also. She was a note of bright and vivid colour in the drab monotony of his life. He began to lie in wait for her, to force his clumsy attentions upon her and she did not seem to resent it unduly. The affair became an obsession. His faculty for reasoning had never been considerable. In some dim way he felt that there was the solution of all those buried yearnings and thwarted desires which had accompanied him through life. Here was an explanation. He was content to be held by the experience, without

formulating any plan or definite resolution. Whether the girl would ultimately succumb to his solicitations, whether she would go away with him, and if so how he was to manage to keep her; moreover, how he was to face the appalling cruelty of his own attitude toward Anne—all these questions he put behind him. For the moment they appeared immaterial to the blinding obsession. One day while still in this indeterminate mood he went home as usual to his mid-day dinner. As he dismounted his bicycle and leant it against the garden fence, Anne came out of the cottage and said:

“Caleb, there’s a gentleman to see you.”

He went inside and beheld a small keen-faced elderly man, who nodded to him and said:

“Mr. Caleb Fryatt?”

“Ay.”

The little man examined him closely.

“I will come straight to the business I have in hand. I am the head clerk of Rogers, Mason and Freeman, solicitors of Blaizing-Killstoke. You, I believe, are the only child of Stephen and Mary Fryatt, late of Cravenford?”

“Ay.”

“You may be aware that your father had a brother, named Leonard, in Nova Scotia?”

“I’ve heard tell on ’ee.”

“Your uncle died last year. He left a little property and no will. My principals are of opinion that you are the lawful legatee. They would be

obliged if you would pay them a visit so that the matter may be fully determined. Here is my card."

Caleb stared dully at the piece of pasteboard, but Anne who had entered the cottage just previously, asked to have the business explained to her. Caleb shouted in her ear. Then she turned to the lawyer and said:

"And how much money did his Uncle Leonard leave? Do you know, sir?"

"Quite without prejudice, and entirely between ourselves, I believe it is a matter of approximately four thousand pounds."

It took the whole of the afternoon for this news thoroughly to penetrate the skull of the fortunate legatee. Indeed, it was not till he had had a pint of beer at "The Green Man" on the way home that the full significance came home to him. It is to be regretted that after his supper he returned to "The Green Man," and for the first time in his life Mr. Caleb Fryatt got drunk. He stood drinks lavishly and indiscriminately. He told everyone his news. The amount became a little distorted. It may have been due to the lawyer's use of the word "approximately." This orgy acted upon him disastrously. As he reeled up the village street, only one vision became clear to him. Agnes! He could take her away, buy her a mansion and smart frocks. He could take her to hotels and theatres in London. At the same time, he could settle money on Anne. He was a millionaire. The world belonged to him. With

a tremendous effort he controlled his feet and voice when he reached the cottage, but he went to bed at once. In the morning he had a headache and Anne bound his head in damp linen handkerchiefs and brought him tea.

By Monday everyone on the countryside from Cravenford to Billows Weir knew that “Old Face,” the ugly man, known as the boy who murdered his father, had come in for a huge fortune left by an uncle in Canada. The first person he met in the brick-works on Monday was Agnes, who came up to him and held out her hand:

“I believe we are to congratulate you, Mr. Fryatt.”

He smiled at her foolishly and held her hand an unnecessarily long time. There was no doubt she had taken to him. She liked him. Could he stir her deeper emotion?

The weeks went by in a dream. He visited the lawyers. Everything was in order. They even offered to advance him money. He could not visualize the full dimensions of his fortune; neither had he the power to act upon it. He still went on at the brick-works and the cottage, listening to Anne’s sensible admonitions to invest the money in small amounts so as to have a nest egg for their old age. But he could not detach this miracle of wealth from the figure of Agnes. They had come together. They belonged to each other, fantastic phenomena jerking him violently out of the deep rut of his existence. One day he went into the town and

bought a gold locket, set with blue stones. He gave four pounds ten for it. He waited for Agnes that evening and gave it to her. He had been in an agony as to whether she would accept it, but to his delight she received it with gratitude and thanked him bewitchingly. This seemed to bind her to him indissolubly. A few evenings later he met her in the lane. There was no one about. Without a word he took her in his arms and pressed his lips to hers. She gasped and spluttered:

“Oh, Mr. Fryatt, please . . . no.”

But she wasn't angry. Oh, no, not really angry—just provocative, more alluring than ever. . . . They met frequently after that, in secret disused corners of the brick-field, in the lanes at night. He bought her more presents, and one Saturday they went secretly to a fair at Molesham and only returned by the last train. The men naturally began to get wind of this illicit courtship, but as far as he knew no rumour had penetrated the deafness of Anne. He was drifting desperately beyond care in either respect. Two months of this intensive worship and the madness was upon him. He said:

“You must come with me. We will run away.”

“Where, Caleb?”

“We'll go to London.”

“Where should we stay?”

“At swell hotels. We will have a carriage. I will buy frocks and jewels.”

The girl's eyes narrowed.



“What about your wife?”

“I’ll make it all right. I’ll settle some money on her.”

But Agnes was not so easily won. Oh dear, no! There were tears and emotion. You see, she was only a young and innocent girl. Suppose he deserted her? What assurance had she? This scheming and plotting went on for weeks. At length they came to an agreement. Agnes would go to London with him if he would first settle a thousand pounds upon her. It was very cheap at the price, and a fair and reasonable bargain. One Saturday they journeyed together to his lawyers at Blaizing-Killstoke. The deed was drawn up, and they both signed various papers. The elopement was fixed for the following Saturday. All the week Caleb walked like a man unconscious of his surroundings. The purposes of his life were to be fulfilled. True, he had odd moments of misgiving. He dared not think about Anne. Also at times he had gloomy forebodings concerning London hotels, how to behave, whether the people would laugh at him, what clothes to wear, whether Agnes would quickly sicken of him. But still he had pledged himself. He jingled the money in his pocket. . . . His destiny.

Friday was a disastrous day. It was cold and damp, and to his disgust he awoke with a severe twinge of rheumatism in his left shoulder. It made him irritable and nervous all day. Agnes was very preoccupied. He had advanced her some money to

buy frocks, and she went backward and forward to her lodgings with large cardboard boxes. He had selected the morrow, because Anne was going away to spend a few days with her father. In the afternoon his rheumatism became worse, and he became aware of the symptoms of a feverish chill. He left off work at his usual time and cycled home. The cottage was all in darkness. He lighted the lamp. Anne had left his supper ready for him on the tray. The little room looked neat and tidy. She had also left a note for him. He picked it up carelessly and held it under the lamp. This is what he read:

Caleb dear, I hear that you have made some money over to Agnes Fareham and that you are wishful to go away with her. My dear! I do not want to interfere with your happiness. I thowt I had been a good wife to you but you know best. I am goin to my father and I shall not come back. Please God you may be happy.

Your broking hearted wife,  
ANNE.

Bless you dear for all you have been to me and the happiness you have give me.

And Caleb buried his face in his hands. Without touching his supper he carried the lamp into the bedroom and went to bed. Curse it! How his teeth were chattering! He would have liked a little brandy, but there was none in the cottage, and there was no one to go and fetch it. He wrapped himself up and rolled over, the interminable night began. What a weak fool he was! All the experiences and

temptations of his life crowded upon him and tortured him. Idle dreams! Idle dreams! His shoulder ached insufferably. If Anne were here, she would rub it with that yellow oil. He could not rub his own shoulder and back. Then she would wrap it up in a thick shawl and say:

“Silly Billy, you must be careful of the damp.”

He could visualize her moving about the room, arranging the curtain so that there was no draught, stirring something in a cup, giving those little dexterous pokes to the bed clothes which meant so much, sitting placidly by the window, his coarse woollen socks in her hand. She loved darning his socks . . . doing things for him, even all the unpleasant, ugly things of domestic life.

He ought to have some soup or gruel or something, but he could not be bothered to make it. He turned out the lamp. And all night long Caleb turned and fretted, and strangely enough he gave little thought to Agnes. She was now becoming the unreality, the vain fancy, a feather drifting on the ocean. She was nothing to him. She had no part in that deep consciousness, amongst whose folds he had sought so desperately to find inner relief. What was it? Where was it? Toward dawn he slept fitfully, struggling to keep awake on account of the disturbing dreams that crowded upon him. When things at last became visible the first thing he was aware of was an old shawl of his wife's on a nail by the door, and cap which she wore to do the housework in. The

things became to him an emblem of the love she bore him, and truth came to him with the rising of the sun. Love—the deep secret her hand had sought; the love that struggles to endure through any conditions, the love that as far as human nature is concerned is permanent and indestructible. He observed its action upon his own career. His mother's love for his father, a love which he had so tragically misinterpreted. Later his love for his country, which had crept upon him across the years and whispered to him across the endless waste of waters. And lastly the love that existed between his wife and himself, a love that was so near and familiar to him that he could not always see it. He sighed and the dreams no longer worried him. It must have been some hours later that he awoke and made himself some tea. He was still shaky, and his shoulder hurt, so he went back to bed.

In the middle of the morning he heard the latch of the front door click, and his heart beat rapidly.

“She has come back,” he thought. He heard some one moving in the passage, his door opened, and on the threshold of the room stood—Agnes! It was queer that on observing her his first thought was with regard to his teeth. During the war he had lost three front teeth. A loving government had presented him with a plate and three false teeth which he always wore in daytime, but which at night, on Anne's advice, he always kept in a glass of water by the side of the bed. He stretched out his hand for

the teeth, and then he felt that he would be ridiculous putting the plate in, so he left the matter alone. She advanced into the room, and neither of them spoke. It is difficult to know precisely what attitude Agnes had resolved to take, but the appearance and atmosphere of that room may have altered or modified it. She merely grinned rather uncomfortably at Caleb. He could not have been an attractive sight. He had slept badly, and he had not washed or shaved. He was wearing a coarse woollen nightgown, and his three front teeth were missing. Perhaps it occurred to her abruptly that in the round of life one has to take the unshorn early morning with the gaily bedecked evening, and she was already wondering whether the combination was worth while. In any case she merely said:

“Well?”

And Caleb replied, “Hullo!”

They both looked a little ashamed then, and Agnes glanced out of the window as though dreading some one’s approach. As he did not speak further, she turned and said:

“You’re not coming then?”

He turned his face to the wall and answered “No.”

There was a definite expression of relief on the girl’s face. She was very smartly dressed in a tailor-made coat and skirt. She edged toward the door. Then she said in a mildly querulous voice:

“I knew you’d back out of it.”

Caleb sat up and exclaimed feelingly:

“I’m sorry, Agnes.”

This seemed to quite appease her, and she said:

“Anything you want, Caleb, before I go?”

The man stared thoughtfully at the ceiling before replying:

“Yes; wait a minute, Agnes.”

He took a pencil and a sheet of paper, and wrote out a telegram addressed to his wife:

“Come back, dear, I want you.”

The girl took up the telegram and read it through thoughtfully. Then she once more edged toward the door. She fumbled with the latch. Suddenly she turned and said:

“That’ll be elevenpence.”

“Eh?”

“That’ll be elevenpence—for the telegram.”

“Oh, ay, that’s it. Yes, elevenpence.”

He fumbled with his trousers on the chair by the side of the bed and produced a shilling.

“There, lass, I haven’t any change. Don’t bother about the penny.”

She took the shilling and went back to the door.

“Good-bye, Caleb.”

“Good-bye.”

When she had gone he thought it was rather queer of her to ask for the shilling. He had already given her a thousand pounds, and many frocks and presents. She might in any case have offered to give him the penny change. However, he soon forgot her in the fever of anxiety he was in as to the return of his wife.

All day long no one came near the cottage. The day was wet, and a thick white mist drifted with the rain. He could not trouble to light the fire. He ate some bread and cheese at mid-day, and vainly tried to rub his shoulder with the oil. Soon after five it began to be dark again. He was in a terror of remorse and fear. Had he destroyed the lamp of his happiness? He buried his face in the pillow and groaned: "I didn't understand! I didn't understand!"

He began to feel so weak; he was losing sense of time. He awakened once with a start. The room seemed suddenly filled with an enveloping comfort. He held out his arms. He felt those wet cheeks pressed close to his. That voice so dear and familiar to him was whispering in his ear:

"Silly Billy, I knew ye would send for me."

## THE BROWN WALLET

**G**ILES MEIKLEJOHN was a beaten man. Huddled in the corner of a third class railway carriage on the journey from Epsom to London, he sullenly reviewed the unfortunate series of episodes which had brought him into the position he found himself. Dogged by bad luck! . . . Thirty-seven years of age; married; a daughter ten years old; nothing attained; his debts exceeding his assets; and now—out of work!

He had tried, too. A little pampered in his upbringing; when the crisis came he had faced it manfully. When, during his very first year at Oxford, the news came of his father's bankruptcy and sudden death from heart failure, he immediately went up to town and sought a situation in any capacity. His mother had died many years previously, and his only sister was married to a missionary in Burmah. His accomplishments at that time? Well, he could play cricket and squash rackets; he knew a smattering of Latin and a smudge of French; he remembered a few dates in history, and he could add up and subtract (a little unreliably). He was good looking, genial, and of excellent physique. He had no illusions about the difficulties which faced him.



His father had always been a kind of practical visionary. Connected with big insurance interests, he was a man of large horizons, profound knowledge, and great ideals. Around his sudden failure and death there had always clung an atmosphere of mystery. That he had never expected to fail, and was unprepared for death a week before it happened is certain. He had had plans for Giles which up to that time he had had no opportunity of putting into operation. The end must have been cyclonic.

Through the intervention of friends, Giles obtained a situation as clerk in an insurance office, his wages amounting to fifteen shillings a week, a sum he had managed to live on. In the evening he attended classes, and studied shorthand and typewriting. At first the freshness of this experience, aided by youth and good health, stimulated him. But as time went on he began to realize that he had chosen work for which he was utterly unsuited. He worked hard but made no progress. He had not a mathematical mind; he was slow in the up-take. The chances of promotion were remote. The men around him seemed so quick and clever. At the end of two years he decided to resign and try something else. If only he had been taught a profession! After leaving the insurance office he went through various experiences; working at a seedsman's nursery, going round with a circus, attempting to get on the stage and failing, working his passage out to South Africa, more clerking, nearly dying from enteric through

drinking polluted water, working on an ostrich farm, returning to England as a male nurse to a young man who was mentally deficient.

It was not till he met Minting that he achieved any success at all. They started a press-cutting agency in two rooms in Bloomsbury. Minting was clever, and Giles borrowed fifty pounds (from whom we will explain later). Strangely enough the press-cutting agency was a success. After the first six months they began to do well.

It was at that time that he met Eleanor. She was secretary to Sir Herbert Woolley, the well-known actor-manager, and she happened to call one day concerning the matter of press-cuttings for her employer. From the very first moment there was never any question on either side but that both he and she had met their fate. Neither had there been an instant's regret on either side ever since. They were completely devoted. With the business promising well, he married her within three months. It is probable that if the business had not existed he would have done the same. They went to live in a tiny flat in Maida Vale, and a child was born the following year.

A period of unclouded happiness followed. There was no fortune to be made out of press-cuttings, but a sufficient competence to keep Eleanor and the child in reasonable comfort. Everything progressed satisfactorily for three years. And then one July morning the blow fell. At that time he and Minting were keeping a junior clerk. Giles and Eleanor had been

away to the sea for a fortnight's holiday. Minting was to go on the day of their return. When Giles arrived at the office he found the clerk alone. To his surprise he heard that Minting had not been there himself for a fortnight. He did not have long to wait to find the solution of the mystery. The first hint came in the discovery of a blank counterfoil. Minting had withdrawn every penny of their small capital and vanished!

Giles did not tell his wife. He made a desperate effort to pull the concern together, but in vain. There were a great number of outstanding debts, and he had just nine shillings when he returned from his holiday. He rushed round and managed to borrow a pound or two here and there, sufficient to buy food and pay off the clerk, but he quickly foresaw that the crash was inevitable. He had not the business acumen of Minting, and no one seemed prepared to invest money in a bankrupt press-cutting agency. In the midst of his troubles the original source of the fifty pounds upon which he started the business, wrote peremptorily demanding the money back. He went there and begged and pleaded, but it was obvious that the "original source" looked upon him as a waster and ne'er-do-well.

He went bankrupt, and Eleanor had to be told. She took it in just the way he knew she would take it. She said:

"Never mind, darling. We'll soon get on our feet again."

She had been a competent secretary, with a knowledge of French, bookkeeping, shorthand and typewriting. She set to work and obtained a situation herself as secretary to the manager of a firm of wall-paper manufacturers, housing the child during the day with a friendly neighbour.

Giles was idle the whole of August. They gave up the flat and went into lodgings. In September he got work as a clerk to a stationer. His salary was thirty shillings a week, a pound less than his wife was getting. He felt the situation bitterly. Poor Eleanor! How he had let her down. When he spoke about it though she only laughed and said:

“If our troubles are never anything worse than financial ones, darling, I shan’t mind.”

They continued to be only financial ones till the following year when Eleanor became very ill. She gave birth to a child that died. In a desperate state Giles again approached the “original source.” After suffering considerable recrimination and bullying he managed to extract another ten pounds, which quickly vanished. It was three months before Eleanor was well enough to resume work, and during that time they lived in a state of penury. Giles lived almost entirely on tea and bread, and became very run down and thin. He pretended to Eleanor that he had had an increase, and that he had a good lunch every day, so that all the money he earned could be spent on her and the baby. In the meantime he dissected desperately that grimmest of all

social propositions—the unskilled labour market. If only he had been taught to be a boot-maker, a plumber, or a house-painter he would have been better off. Manners may make men, but they don't make money, and one has to make money to live. He became envious of his fellow clerks and shop assistants who had never tasted the luxurious diet of a public school training. That he had brains he was fully aware, but they had never been trained in any special direction. They were, moreover, the kind of brains that do not adapt themselves to commercial ends. He had always had a great affection for his father, but he began to nurture a resentment against his memory. His father had treated him badly, bringing him up to a life of ease and assurance and then deserting him.

It would be idle and not very interesting to trace the record of his experiences during the next years up to the time when we find him in the train on the way back from Epsom. It is a dreary story, the record of a series of dull underpaid jobs, a few bright gleams of hope, even days and nights of complete happiness, then dull reactions, strain, worry, hunger, nervous fears, blunted ambitions, and thwarted desires. Through it all the only thing that remained unalterably bright and inspiring, was his wife's face. Not once did she flinch, not once did she lose hope. Her constant slogan: "Never mind, old darling, we'll soon be on our feet again," was ever in his ears, buoying him up through the darkest hours.

And again he was out of work, again Eleanor was not well, and again he had been to the "original source."

The "original source" was his uncle, his father's brother. He was a thin, acid old gentleman, known in commercial circles as a money-maniac. Living alone in a large house at Epsom, with all kinds of telephonic connections with the city, he thought and dreamed of nothing at all but his mistress—money. Between him and Giles' father had always existed a venomous hatred, far more pronounced on the side of his uncle than of his father. It had dated back many years. When his father died and Giles appealed to his uncle, the old gentleman appeared thoroughly to enjoy giving him five pounds as an excuse for a lecture and a subtly conveyed sneer at his father's character.

He was a very wealthy man, and he could easily have launched Giles into the world by putting him through the training for one of the professions, but he preferred to dole out niggardy little bits of charity and advice, and to boast that he himself was a self-made man, who had had no special training.

"No," thought Giles, "but you have an instinct for making money. I haven't. You don't have to train a duck to swim."

Naturally, they very quickly quarrelled, and his uncle seemed to rejoice in his failures. It was only in his most desperate positions that he appealed to him again.

Lying back in the dimly lighted railway carriage he kept on visualizing his uncle's keen malevolent eyes, the thrust of the pointed chin. The acid tones of his voice echoed through his brain:

"It's quite time, my lad, you pulled yourself together. You ought to have made your fortune by now. Don't imagine I'm always going to help you."

Giles had humbled his pride for his wife and child's sake. He had spent the night at his uncle's, and by exercising his utmost powers of cajolery, had managed to extort three pounds. Three pounds! and the rent overdue, bills pressing, his wife unwell and he—out of work. What was he going to do?

The train rumbled into Waterloo Station without any satisfactory answer being arrived at. He pulled his bag out from under the seat, and stepped slowly out of the carriage.

Walking along the platform it suddenly occurred to him that he was feeling weak and exhausted. "I hope to God I'm not going to be ill," he thought.

The bag, which only contained his night things and a change of clothes, seemed unbearably heavy. A slight feeling of faintness came over him as he passed the ticket-collector.

"I believe I shall have to have a cab," flashed through him.

Two important-looking men got out of a taxi which had just driven up. Giles engaged it, and having given his address he stepped in and sank back

exhausted on to the seat. It was very dark in the cab, and he lay huddled in the corner—a beaten man. Everything appeared distant and dim, and unimportant. He had hardly eaten any lunch, and his uncle seemed to have arranged that he should leave his house just before dinner. It was late, and he was hungry and over-wrought.

The cab turned a corner sharply, and Giles lurched and thrust his hand on to the other end of the seat to prevent himself falling. As he did so his knuckles brushed against an object. Quite apathetically he felt to see what it was. He picked it up and held it near the window. It was a brown leather wallet, with a circular brass lock. He regarded it dubiously, and for an instant hesitated whether he should tell the driver to go back to the station, the wallet presumably belonging to one of those two important-looking men who had got out. But would it be possible to find them? By that time they would probably have gone off by train. No, the right thing to do was to give it up to the police, of course.

It was a fat wallet, and he sat there with it in his hand ruminating. He wondered what it contained. Quite easy just to have a squint anyway. He tried to slip the catch but it wouldn't open. It was locked. It is difficult to determine the extent to which this knowledge affected him. If it had not been locked Giles Meiklejohn's immediate actions, and indeed his future career might have been entirely different. It irritated him that the wallet was locked . . .



tantalized him. If it was locked it meant that it contained something . . . pretty useful. All round the park he lay back in the cab hugging the wallet like one in a trance.

A desperate, beaten man, holding a fat wallet in his hand. Contrary forces were struggling within his tired mind. Going up Park Lane one of these forces seemed to succumb to the other. Almost in a dream he leant out of the cab, and said quietly to the driver:

“Drive to the Trocadero. I think I’ll get a bit of supper first.”

Arriving there, he paid the cabman, concealed the wallet in his overcoat and went in. He entered a lavatory and locked himself in. With unruffled deliberation he took out a penknife and began to saw away at the leather around the lock.

“I just want to have a squint,” he kept on mentally repeating.

It took him nearly a quarter of an hour to get the wallet open, and when he did his heart was beating like a sledge hammer.

The wallet contained eight thick packets of one pound treasury notes! He feverishly computed the number which each packet contained, and decided that it must be two hundred and fifty. In other words, he had two thousand pounds’ worth of ready cash in his possession!

A desperate, beaten man, with a wife and child, hungry . . . out of work . . . two thousand pounds! . . .

There seemed no question about it all then. One side of the scale was too heavily weighted. He took seventeen of the one pound notes and put them in his pocket book, the rest he divided into the pockets of his overcoat, where he also concealed the wallet. He went up into the bar and ordered a double brandy and soda. He drank it in two gulps and went out and hailed another taxi. On the way home he stopped at a caterer's, and bought a cold fowl, some pressed beef, new rolls, cheese, a box of chocolates, and a bottle of wine. Then he drove homeward.

Up to this point his actions seemed to have been controlled by some sub-conscious force. So far as his normal self was concerned, he had hardly thought at all. But as he began to approach his own neighbourhood—his own wife—the realization of what he had done—what he was doing—came home to him. . . .

“It was practically stealing. It is stealing, you know.”

Yes, but what would any one else have done in that position? He couldn't let his wife and child starve. There was only one thing he was afraid of . . . his wife's eyes. She must never know. He would have to be cunning, circumspect. He must get rid of the wallet, conceal the notes from his wife—eke them out in dribbles, pretend he was making money somehow. But the wallet? He couldn't leave it in the cab. It would be found and the cabman would give evidence. He mustn't drive

home at all. He must get out again, think again. Between Paddington and Maida Vale runs a canal. Happy thought! a canal! he stopped at the bridge and dismissed the man again, tipping him lavishly. The banks of the canal were railed off. It was only possible to get near enough to throw anything in from the bridge. Thither he walked at a rapid stride. The feeling of exhaustion had passed. He was tingling with excitement. He looked eagerly about for a stone, and cursed these modern arrangements of wooden pavements. There were no stones near the canal. Never mind, the thing would probably sink. If it didn't, who could trace its discovery to his action? The point was to get rid of it unseen.

He reached the bridge. A few stray people were passing backward and forward—must wait till everyone was out of sight. He hung about, gripping his portmanteau in one hand, and the wallet in his right hand overcoat pocket. He crossed the bridge once, but still seeing dark figures about he had to return. Why not throw it now? No, there was someone watching in the road opposite—might be a policeman! The police! never had cause to feel frightened at the police before. There would be a splash. Someone might come out of the darkness, a deep voice:

“What was that you threw in the canal?”

No, no, couldn't do it. The bridge was too exposed, too much of a fairway. He hurried off walking rapidly down side streets in the direction of his

home. At last an opportunity presented itself. Shabby, deserted little street, a low stone wall enclosing a meagre garden. Not a soul in sight. Like a flash he slipped the wallet over the wall and dropped it. Instantaneously he looked up at the house connected with the garden. A man was looking out of the first floor window, watching him!

He turned and walked quickly back. He thought he heard a call. At the first turning he ran, the portmanteau banging against his leg and impeding his progress. He only ceased running because people stopped and looked at him suspiciously.

"It's all right! It's all right!" he kept saying to himself. "I've got rid of it."

Yes, he was rid of that danger, but there loomed before him the more insidious difficulty of concealing the notes. His pockets bulged with them. When he arrived home, Eleanor would run out into the landing and throw her arms round him. He could almost hear the tones of her gentle voice saying:

"Whatever have you got in your pockets, darling?"

If he put them in the portmanteau she would be almost certain to open it, or she would be in the room when he went to unpack. Very difficult to conceal anything from Eleanor; she knew all about him; every little thing about him interested her. Nothing in their rooms was locked up. Moreover, she was very observant, methodical and practical. Someone had called her psychic, but this was only because she

thought more quickly than most people, and had unerring intuitions.

Giles would have to be very cunning. His mental energies were so concerned with the necessity for deceiving Eleanor that the moral aspect of his position was temporarily blurred. He plunged on through the darkness, his mind working rapidly. At the corner of their meagre street he was tempted to stuff the notes in a pillar box and hurry home.

“Don’t be a fool,” said the other voice. “Here is comfort and luxury interminably—not only for yourself, for the others.”

He went boldly up to the house and let himself in. He heard other lodgers talking in the front ground floor room. He hurried by and reached his own landing. To his relief Eleanor’s voice came from the room above:

“Is that you, darling?”

He dumped the bag down and in a flash had removed his overcoat and hung it on a peg in a dark corner. Then he called out:

“Hullo, old girl. Everything all right?”

Within a minute his wife’s arms were around him, and he exclaimed with forced triumph:

“I touched the old boy for twenty pounds! I’ve brought home a chicken and things.”

“Oh! how splendid! A chicken! Rather extrav. isn’t it, darling?”

“One must live, dear angel.”

Her confidence and trust in him, her almost child-

ish glee over the gay feast, her solicitude in his welfare, her anxiety that little Anna should have some chicken, but keep the sweets till the morrow, her voice later crooning over the child—all these things mocked his conscience. But he couldn't afford to have a conscience. He couldn't afford to say:

“I stole all this and more.”

He was eager for the attainment of that last instance—crooning over the child. Whilst he was putting the little girl to bed, he crept out into the passage and extracted the packets of notes from his overcoat pocket. He took them into the sitting room and wrapped them up in brown paper. He wrote on the outside, “stationery.” Then he stuffed the parcel at the back of a cupboard where they kept all kinds of odds and ends.

“That'll have to do for to-night,” he thought. “I'm too tired to think of anything better.”

When she came down he enlarged the claims of his exhaustion. He had a bit of a head he explained, just as well to turn in early. In the darkness he clung to her fearfully, like a child in terror of separation.

It was not till she was sleeping peacefully that the enormity of his offence came home to him.

If he were found out! It would kill her.

He remembered her expression:

“If our troubles are never anything worse than financial ones, darling, I shan't mind.”

Good God! What had he done? He could call it

what he liked, but crudely speaking it was just stealing. He had stolen. He was a criminal, a felon. If found out, it meant arrest, trial, imprisonment—all these horrors he had only vaguely envisaged as concerning a different type of person to himself. In the rough and tumble of his life he had never before done anything criminal, never anything even remotely dishonest. And she, Eleanor, what would she think of him? It would destroy her love, destroy her life, ruin the child.

He must get up, go into the other room and—what? What could he do with the notes? Burn them? Eleanor had that mother's curious faculty for profound, but at the same time, watchful sleep. If he got out of bed she would be aware of it. If he went into the next room and began burning things, she would be instantly alert.

“What's that burning, darling?”

An ever-loving wife may be an embarrassment when one is not quite playing the game. By destroying the wallet he had burnt his boats. If he returned the money he would have to explain what the wallet was doing in a neighbour's garden with the brass lock cut away.

“Besides, you've already spent some,” interjected that other voice. “You're horribly in debt. Here's succour. The money probably belongs to some rich corporation. It's not like taking it from the poor. Don't be a fool. Go to sleep.”

For hours he tossed feverishly, the pendulum of

his resolutions swinging backward and forward. If he was to keep the money, he would have to invent some imaginary source of income, a fictitious job, perhaps, and that would be very difficult because Eleanor was so solicitous, such a glutton for details concerning himself. He might have made out that his uncle had given him a much larger sum of money, but in that case there was the danger that in her impetuous manner Eleanor might have written to the old man, and the old man would smell a rat. Doubtless the affair of the lost wallet would be in the papers the next day, and wouldn't the old man be delighted to bring it home to Giles!

There was nothing to be done but to trust to fate. The milk carts were clattering in the road before he slept.

It was hours later that he heard Anna's merry little laugh, and his wife's voice saying:

"Hush, darling, daddy's asleep. He's very tired."

He got up and faced the ordeals of the day. The place at the back of the lumber cupboard seemed the most exposed in the world. He racked his brains for a more suitable spot. But whichever place he thought of danger seemed to lurk. One never quite knew what Eleanor might do. She was so keen on tidying up and clearing things out. He decided that a crisp walk might clear his mind. He made up the excuse that he was going to the public library to look through the advertisements and went out. He meant to smuggle the parcel of notes out with him.



but Eleanor was too much on the spot. She helped him on with his overcoat and said:

“It’ll soon be all right again, darling.”

Poor Eleanor! What a capacity she had for living! She ought to have married a rich, successful, and clever man. She ought to have everything a beautiful woman desires. Well? . . . He walked quickly to the nearest news-agent and bought a paper. There was nothing in the morning paper about the loss of the wallet. He felt annoyed about this, until he realized that of course there wouldn’t have been time. It would come out later. And indeed whilst standing on the curb anxiously scrutinizing his morning paper, boys came along the street selling the *Star* and the *Evening News*.

A paragraph in the *Star*, headed “£2,000 left in a taxi,” supplied him with the information he needed. It announced that Sir James Cusping, K.B.E., a director of a well-known bank and a chief cashier, left a wallet containing two thousand pounds in treasury notes in a taxi at Waterloo Station. The money was the result of a cash transaction concerning certain bank investments. Any one giving information likely to lead to recovery would be suitably rewarded. It also announced that Scotland Yard had the matter in hand.

So far the information was satisfactory. Sir James Cusping was a notoriously wealthy man, and the chief cashier was hardly likely to be held seriously responsible for a loss for which such an important

person was jointly responsible. The bank mentioned was a bank that advertised that its available assets exceeded four hundred million pounds. Two thousand pounds meant less to it than two pence would mean to Giles. No one was hurt by the transfer of this useful sum to his own pocket. The sun was shining. Why be down in the mouth about it? What he had done he had done, and he must see it through.

How could anybody trace the theft to him? The two cabmen? They would be hardly likely to remember his face, and neither of them had driven him home. There was no danger from any one except Eleanor. A sudden fever of dread came over him. She would assuredly turn out that cupboard today, find the packet of "stationery." Then—what?

He hurried back home. Approaching the house other fears assailed him. He had visions of policemen waiting for him on the other side of the hall door.

Damn it! His nerves were going to pot. He opened the door with exaggerated nonchalance. There was no one there. No one up in his rooms except his wife and child. Eleanor was singing. The kettle was on the gas ring, ready for tea.

"What a cad I am to her," he thought.

The condition of frenzied agitation continued till the following afternoon when it reached a crisis. He was feeling all unstrung. Seated alone in their little sitting room he was struggling with the resolution to confess everything to Eleanor, when she

entered the room. He glanced at her and nearly screamed. *She was holding up the parcel in her hand!*

In her cheerful voice she said:

“What is this parcel marked stationery, darling? I was turning out the cupboard.”

Like an animal driven to bay he jumped up and almost snatched it from her. The inspiration of despair prompted him to exclaim:

“Oh! . . . that! Yes, yes, I wanted that. It’s something a chap wanted me to get for him . . . It doesn’t belong to me.”

A chap! What chap? Giles didn’t usually refer to chaps. They had no secrets apart. She looked surprised.

“I was just going to open it. As a matter of fact we have run out of stationery.”

“Eh? No, no, not that. I must send that back. I’ll get some more stationery.”

He tucked the packet under his arm and went out into the hall.

“You’re not going out at once?” said Eleanor, following.

“Yes, yes, I must post it at once. I’d quite forgotten.”

He slipped on his coat and went out without his customary embrace.

Beads of perspiration were on his brow.

“That’s done it!” he muttered in the street, “I must never take it back.”

An extravagant plan formed in his mind. He

went to the library and looked at the advertisements in a local paper. He took down some addresses in St. John's Wood. In half an hour's time he was calling on a landlady in a mean street.

"You have a furnished room to let?" he said when she appeared.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, it's like this. I am an author. I want a quiet room to work in during the day time."

"I've got a nice room as would suit you."

"Come on, then, let me see it, please."

He booked the room, a shabby little over-crowded apartment.

"I'll be coming in to-day," he said.

"Very good, sir. What name might it be?"

"Er—name? Oh, yes, name—er—John Parsons."

He fled down the street and sought a furnishing establishment.

"I want an oak desk which I can lock up—a good strong lock."

He paid seven pounds ten for the desk, and got it taken round at once on a barrow. He then bought scribbling papers, paper, and ink. He established himself in his room, stuffed the packet of notes in the desk and locked it. Then he went out into the street again. The fresh air fanned his temples. He almost chuckled.

"By God! Why didn't I think of this at first?" he reflected. "After the life I've led one forgets the power of money."

He felt singularly calm and confident. It was dark when he got home. He kissed Eleanor and made up an elaborate story about a fellow clerk named Lyel Bristowe, who used to work in the same office, and whom he had met in the street recently. He had wanted this particular stationery most particularly. He had been to see him, and Bristowe was giving him an introduction to a man who might be able to offer him a good situation. The story went down reasonably well, but he thought he detected a pucker of suspicion about his wife's brow.

He was too involved now to turn back. The following day he visited his furnished room. He anxiously unlocked the desk, took out the notes, examined them, put them back, took them out again, stuffed them in his pocket. . . . Very dangerous after all leaving them there, a flimsy lock . . . there might be a burglary. He had told the landlady that he was an author, and it is true that he spent a great portion of the day inventing fiction . . . lies to tell Eleanor. He eventually locked the notes up again and went home.

He assumed a somewhat forced air of triumph. He had been successful. Through the influence of Bristowe, he had secured a position as chief cashier to a firm of surgical instrument makers in Camden Town. His salary was to be five pounds a week to commence. Eleanor clapped her hands.

"Oh, but how lovely, darling! I suppose you can do it? You're such an old silly at figures!"

He explained that the work was quite simple, and added ironically that the great thing Messrs. Binns and Binns wanted was a man they could trust.

Then the narrow life of lies proceeded apace. Every day he went to his room, fingered the notes, took some when he needed them, deliberately invented the names and characters of his fellow workers at Messrs. Binns and Binns, even made up little incidents and stories concerning his daily experiences. The whole affair was so inordinately successful. No further reference was made in the newspapers to the missing wallet, and though Scotland Yard were supposed to have the matter in hand, what could they do? Even if by chance suspicion fell on him, there was nothing incriminating to be found in his lodgings, and not a soul knew the whereabouts of "John Parsons." His wife and child were living comfortably. He was gradually paying off his debts.

But if the purely material side of his adventure was successful, the same cannot be said of the spiritual. He was tortured beyond endurance. Lies bred lies. The moral lapse bred other moral lapses. He was conscious of his own moral degeneration. He was ashamed to look his wife in the face. In the evening when he intended to be gay and cheerful he sat morosely in the corner, wishing that the night would come—and go. In the day time he would sit in his room, fretful and desolate. In a mood of despair he began to set down his experiences in terms

of fiction, ascribing his feelings to an imaginary person. Sometimes when the position became unbearable he would go out and drink. Often he would go up to the West End and lunch extravagantly at some obscure restaurant. He came into touch with unsavoury people of the underworld.

The marks of his deterioration quickly became apparent to his wife. One morning she said:

“Darling, you’re working too hard at that place. You look rotten. Last night when you came home you smelt of brandy.”

Then she wept a little, a thing she had never done in their days of adversity. He promised not to do such a thing again. He swore that the work was not hard; the firm were very pleased with him and were going to give him a raise.

The weeks and months went by and he struggled to keep straight. But little by little he felt himself slipping back. He managed to write a few things which he sent off to publishers, but for the most part he avoided his room for any length of time, and sat about in obscure cafés in Soho, drinking and playing cards.

Between himself and his wife the great chasm seemed to be yawning. She was to him the dearest treasure in the world, and he was thrusting her away. In that one weak moment he had destroyed all chance of happiness—hers and his. Too late! Too late! In six months’ time he found that he had spent nearly five hundred pounds! At this rate in another

eighteen months it would all be gone, and then—what? His moral character destroyed, his wife broken in health, the child without protection or prospects.

One morning he observed his wife glancing in the mirror as she did her hair. It came home to him abruptly that she had aged, aged many years in the last six months. Soon she would be turning gray, middle-aged, old-aged. And he? His hair was thin on top, his face flabby, his organisms becoming inefficient and weak, his nerves eternally on edge. Sometimes he was rude and snappy to her. And he buried his face in the pillow and thought:

“Oh, my darling, what have I done? What have I done?”

That day he concentrated on a great resolve. This thing would have to stop. He would rather be a starving clerk again, rather a bricklayer's navvy, a crossing-sweeper, anything. He wandered the streets, hugging his determination. He avoided his old haunts. There must be no compromise. The thing should be cut clean out. He would confess. They would send back the remainder of the money anonymously, and start all over again. It was hard, but anything was better than this torture.

He returned home early in the afternoon, his face pale and tense. His wife was on the landing. She said:

“Oh, I was just going to send a telegram on to you. It's from your uncle. He says come at once.”



A queer little stab of the old instinct of conspiracy went through him. If she had sent the telegram on, it would have come back: "No such firm known at this address."

What did his uncle want? Come at once? Should he go, or should he make his confession first?

"I think you ought to go, darling. It sounds important."

Very well, then. The confession should be postponed till his return.

He caught a train at a quarter to four, and arrived at his uncle's house in daylight. An old housekeeper let him in and said:

"Ah! Your uncle's been asking for you. The doctor's here."

"Is he ill?"

"They say he hasn't long to live. The poor man is in great agony."

He was kept waiting ten minutes. A doctor came out to him, looking very solemn.

"I've just given him an injection of strychnine. He wishes to see you alone."

His uncle was propped up against the pillows. His face unrecognizable except for the eyes, which were unnaturally bright. Giles went close up to him, and took his hand. The old man's voice was only just audible. He whispered:

"Quickly! quickly! I shall be going——"

"What is it, uncle?"

"It mustn't come out, see? musn't get into the

newspapers, nothing, the disgrace, see? That's why . . . no cheques must pass; all cash transaction, see?"

"What do you want me to do?"

"On that bureau . . . a brown paper parcel . . . it's yours, all in bonds and cash, see? Twenty-eight thousand pounds . . . it really belongs to your father . . . I can't explain . . . I'm going. He—I swindled him . . . he thought he was . . . its all through me he . . . bankrupt, death, see?"

"Do you mean my father . . . killed himself?"

"Not exactly, see? Hastened his end . . . thought he would get into trouble. Take it, Giles, for God's sake! Let me die in peace."

"Why did you? Why did you?"

"I loved your mother. . . . Take it, Giles, for God's sake. Oh, this pain! . . . it's coming . . . God help me!

It was very late when Giles arrived home. His wife was asleep in bed. All the way home he had been repeating to himself in a dazed way:

"Twenty-eight thousand pounds. No, twenty-six thousand. Two thousand to be sent back anonymously to the bank. No need for confession. Twenty-six thousand pounds. Eleanor, Anna. Oh, my dears!"

On the table in the sitting-room was a letter from a firm of publishers, addressed to Mr. John Parsons.

It stated that the firm considered the short novel submitted to be a work of striking promise, and the manager would be glad if Mr. Parsons would call on them.

“Perhaps I’ve found out what I can do,” Giles meditated.

Eleanor came into the room in her dressing-gown and embraced him.

“All right, darling?”

“Very much. Uncle has given me twenty-eight—I mean twenty-six thousand pounds. He said he cheated my father out of it.”

“Darling! Cheated! How awful.”

No, there was no need for confession. The sudden wild change in their fortunes got into his blood. He gripped her round the waist and lifted her up.

“Think of it, old girl, money to live on for ever. A place in the country, eh? You know, your dream: a bit of land and an old house, flowers, chickens, dogs, books, a pony perhaps. What about it?”

“Oh, Giles, I can’t realize it. But how splendid, too, about the publishers’ letter. Why didn’t you tell me you were writing? Why do you call yourself John Parsons?”

No need for confession, no, no, let’s go to bed. But oh! to get back to the old intimacy. . . .

And so in the silent night he told her everything.

And the tears she shed upon his burning cheeks gave him the only balm of peace he had enjoyed since the hour he had destroyed the wallet.

It was Eleanor's hand which printed in Roman lettering on the outside of a parcel the address of Sir James Cusping, K.B.E. Inside were two thousand pounds in treasury notes, and on a slip of paper in the same handwriting: "*Conscience money. Found in a taxi.*"

THE END











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